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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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SIR ROBERT'S FORTUNE

THE STORY OF A SCOTCH MOOR

BY

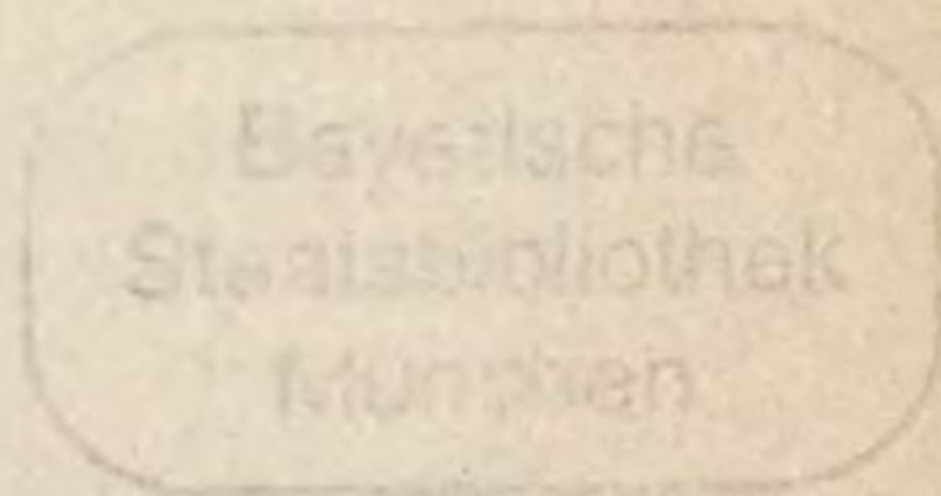
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AUTHOR OF "THE CHRONICLES OF CARLINGFORD," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1896.



This is a lonesome place for one like you.

WORDSWORTH.

SIR ROBERT'S FORTUNE.

CHAPTER I.

"WE are to see each other no more."

These words were breathed rather than spoken in the dim recess of a window, hidden behind ample curtains; the deep recess in which the window was set leaving room enough for two figures standing close together. Without was a misty night, whitened rather than lighted by a pale moon.

"Who says so?"

"Alas! my uncle," said the white figure, which looked misty, like the night, in undistinguishable whiteness amid the darkness round.

The other figure was less distinguishable still, no more than a faint solidity in the atmosphere, but from it came a deeper whisper, the low sound of a man's voice—"Your uncle!" it said.

There was character in the voices enough to throw some light upon the speakers, even though they were unseen. The woman's had a faint accentuation of feeling, not of anxiety, yet half defiance and half appeal.

It seemed to announce a fact unchangeable, yet look and hope for a contradiction. The man's had a tone of acceptance and dismay. The fiat which had gone forth was more real to him than to her, though she was in the position of asserting, and he of opposing it.

"Yes," she said, "Ronald, my uncle—who has the strings of the purse and everything else in his hands—"

There was a moment's pause, and then he said—"How does he mean to manage that?"

"I am to be sent off to-morrow—it's all settled—and if I had not contrived to get out to-night, you would never have known."

"But where? It all depends upon that," he said, with a little impatience.

"To Dalrugas," she answered with a sigh; and then—"It is miles and miles from anywhere—a moor and a lodge, and not even a cottage near. Dougal and his wife live there, and take care of the place; not a soul can come near it—it is the end of the world. Oh, Ronald, what shall I do? what shall I do?"

Once more in the passionate distress of the tone there was an appeal, and a sort of feverish hope.

"We must think; we must think," he said.

"What will thinking do? It will not change my uncle's heart, nor the distance, nor the dreadful solitude. What does he care if it kills me?—or anybody?" The last words came from her with a shriller tone of misery, as if it had become too much to bear.

"Hush, hush, for Heaven's sake! they will hear you!" he said.

On the other side of the curtain there was a merry

crowd in full career of a reel, which in those days had not gone out of fashion as now. The wild measure of the music, now quickening to lightning speed, now dropping to sedate motion, with the feet of the dancers keeping time, filled the atmosphere—a shriek would scarcely have been heard above that mirthful din.

“Oh, why do you tell me to hush?” cried the girl impetuously. “Why should I mind who hears? It is not for duty or love that I obey him, but only because he has the money. Am I caring for his money? I could get my own living; it would not want much. Why do I let him do what he likes with me?”

“My darling,” said the man’s voice anxiously, “don’t do anything rash, for God’s sake! Think of our future. To displease him, to rebel, would spoil everything. I see hope in the loneliness, for my part. Be patient, be patient, and let me work it out.”

“Oh, your working out!” she cried. “What good has it done? I would cut the knot. It would be strange if we two could not get enough to live upon—or myself, if you are afraid.”

He soothed her, coming closer, till the dark shadow and the white one seemed but one, and murmured caressing words in her ears—“Let us wait till the case is desperate, Lily; it is not desperate yet. I see chances in the moor and wilderness. He is playing into our hands, if he only knew it. Don’t, don’t spoil everything by your impatience! Leave it to me, and you’ll see good will come out of it.”

“I would rather take it into my own hands,” she cried.

"No, dearest, no! I see, I see all sorts of good in it. Go quite cheerfully as if you were pleased. No, your own way is best—don't let us awake any suspicions—go as if you were breaking your heart."

"There will be no feigning in that," she said; "I shall be breaking my heart."

"For a moment," he said. "'Weeping endureth for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.'"

"Don't, Ronald! I can't bear to hear you quoting Scripture."

"Why not? I am not the devil, I hope," he said, with a low laugh.

There was a question in the girl's hot, impatient heart, and then a quick revulsion of feeling. "I don't know what to do, or to think; I feel as if I could not bear it," she said, the quick tears dropping from her eyes.

He wiped them tenderly away with the flourish of a white handkerchief in the dark. "Trust to me," he said soothingly. "Be sure it is for our good, this. Listen, they are calling for you, Lily."

"Oh, what do I care? How can I go among them all, and dance as if I were as gay as the rest, when my heart is broken?"

"Not so badly broken but that it will mend," he whispered as with a clever, swift movement he put aside the curtain, and led her through. He was so clever: where any other man would have been lost in perplexity, or even despair, Ronald Lumsden always saw a way through. He was never at a loss for an expedient: even that way of getting back to the room out of the shadow of the curtains no one could have performed so easily,

so naturally as he did. He met and entered into the procession of dancers going out of the room after the exertions of that reel, as if he and his partner formed part of it, and had been dancing too. People did not "sit out" in those days, and Ronald was famous for his skill in the national dance. Nobody doubted that he had been exerting himself with the rest. Lily was half English—that is, she had been sent to England for part of her education, and so far as reels were concerned, had lost some of her native skill, and was not so clever. She was not, indeed, supposed to be clever at all, though very nice, and pretty enough, and an heiress—at least she was likely to be an heiress, if she continued to please her uncle, who was not an easy man to please, and exacted absolute obedience. There were people who shook their heads over her chances, declaring that flesh and blood could not stand Sir Robert Ramsay's moods: but up to this time, Lily had been more or less successful, and the stake being so great, she had, people said, "every encouragement to persevere."

But Lily was by no means so strong as her lover, who joined the throng as if he had formed part of it, with a perfect air of enjoyment and light-heartedness. Lily could not look happy. It may be said that in his repeated assurance that all would be right, and that he would find a way out of it, she ought to have taken comfort, feeling in that a pledge of his fidelity and steadiness to his love. But there was something in this readiness of resource which discouraged, she could not have told why, instead of making her happy. It would have been so much simpler, so much more satisfactory, to have given up all thoughts of Sir Robert's

money, and trusted to Providence and their own exertions to bring them through. Lily felt that she could make any sacrifice, live upon nothing, live anywhere, work her fingers to the bone, only to be independent, to be free of the bondage of the uncle, and the consciousness that it was not for love, but for his money, that she had to accept all his caprices, and yield him obedience. If Ronald would but have yielded, if he would have been imprudent as so many young men were, how thankful she would have been! She would have been content with the poorest living anywhere, to be free, to be with him, whom she loved. She would have undertaken the conduct of their little *ménage* herself, without even thinking of servants—she would have cooked for him, cleaned the house for him, shrunk from nothing. But that, alas! was not Ronald's way of looking at the matter. He believed in keeping up appearances, in being rich at almost any cost, and, at best, in looking rich if he were not really so; and, above all and beyond all, in keeping well with the uncle and retaining the fortune. He could not have any doubt thrown on the necessity of that. He was confident of his own powers of cheating the uncle, and managing so that Lily should have all she wanted in spite of him, by throwing dust in his eyes. But Lily's soul revolted against throwing dust in anyone's eyes. This was the great difference between them. I do not say that there was any great sin in circumventing a harsh old man, who never paused to think what he was doing, or admitted a question as to whether he was or was not absolutely in the right. He was one of the men who always know themselves to be absolutely right; therefore

he was, as may be said, fair game. But Lily did not like it. She would have liked a lover who said—"Never mind, we shall be happy without him and his fortune." She had tried everything she knew to bring young Lumsden to this point. But she was not able to do so; his opinion was that everything must be done to preserve the fortune, and that, however hard it might be, there was nothing so hard but that it must be accomplished somehow to humour old Sir Robert, to prevent him from cutting his niece out of his will. Was not this right? Was it not prudent, wise, the best thing? If he, an advocate without a fee, a briefless barrister, living as best he could on chance windfalls and bits of legal work, had been as bold as she desired, and carried her off from the house in Moray Place to some garret of his own up among the roofs, would not everybody have said that he had taken advantage of her youth and inexperience, and deprived her of the comforts and luxuries she was used to? That Lily cared nothing for those luxuries, and that she was of the mettle to adapt herself to any circumstances, so long as she had somebody to love and who loved her, was not a thing to reckon with public opinion about; and, indeed, Ronald Lumsden would have thought himself quite unjustified in reckoning with it at all. To tell the truth, he had no desire on his own part to give up such modest luxuries for himself as were to be had.

The day of clubs was not yet, at least in Edinburgh, to make life easy for young men; but yet to get along, as he was doing precariously, was easier for one than it would be for two. Even Lily, all hot for sacrifice, and for ministering with her own hands to all the needs of life, had never contemplated the idea of doing without

Robina, her maid, who had been with her so many years that it was impossible for either of them to realise what life would be if they were separated. Even if a life of poverty should be necessary, Robina was included as a matter of course. How it might be that Lily should require to scrub, and clean, and cook with her own hands, while she was attended by a lady's maid, was a thing she had never reasoned out. You may think that a lady's maid would probably be of less use than her mistress, had such service been necessary; but this was not Robina's case, who was a very capable person all round, and prided herself on being able to "turn her hand" to anything. But then a runaway match was the last thing that was in Lumsden's thoughts.

It was a dance which everybody enjoyed that evening, in the big, old-fashioned rooms in George Square. George Square had fallen out of knowledge in all the expansions of new Edinburgh, the Edinburgh that lies on the other side of the valley, and dates no farther back than last century. It also is of last century, but earlier than the Moray Places and Crescents; far earlier than the last developments, the Belgravia of the town. There Sir Walter once lived in, I think, his father's house; and these substantial, ample, homely houses were the first outlet of the well-to-do, the upper classes of Edinburgh, out of the closes and high up apartments, approached through the atrocities of a common stair, in which so refined and luxurious a sybarite as Lawyer Pleydell still lived in Sir Walter's own time. These mansions are severely plain outside; "undemonstrative," as Scotch pride arrogantly declares itself to be, aping humility with a pretence to which I, for one, feel dis-

posed to allow no quarter; but they are large and pleasant inside, and the big square rooms the very thing to dance in or feast in. They were full of a happy crowd, bright in colour and lively in movement, with a larger share of golden hair and rosy cheeks than is to be seen in most assemblies, and, perhaps, a greater freedom of laughter and talk than would have been appropriate to a solemn ball in other localities. For Edinburgh was not so large then as now, and they all knew each other, and called each other by their Christian names—boy and girl alike—with a general sense of fraternity modified by almost as many love affairs as there were pairs of boys and girls present. There were mothers and aunts all round the wide walls, but this did not subdue the hilarity of the young ones, who knew each other's mothers and aunts almost as well as they knew their own, and counted upon their indulgence. Lily Ramsay was almost the only girl who had nobody of her own to turn to; but this only made her the more protected and surrounded, everybody feeling that the motherless girl had a special claim. They were by no means angels, these old-fashioned Edinburgh folk; sharper tongues could not be than were to be found among them, or more wicked wits, but there was a great deal of kindness under the terrible turbans which crowned the heads of the elder ladies and the scarves which fell from their bare shoulders, and they all knew everyone, and everyone's father and mother for generations back. Their dress was queer, or rather I should have said it was queer before the present revival of the early Victorian or late Georgian style began. They wore puffed-out sleeves, with small feather pillows in them to keep

them inflated; they had bare shoulders and ringlets; they had scarves of lace or silk, carefully disposed so as not to cover anything, but considered very classical and graceful, drawn in over the elbows, by people who knew how to wear them, making manifest the slender waist (or often the outlines of a waist which had ceased to be slender) behind. And they had, as has been said, a dreadful particular, which it is to be hoped the blind fury of fashion will not bring up again—turbans upon their heads. Turbans such as no Indian or Bedouin ever wore, of all colours and every kind of savage decoration, such as may be seen in pictures of that alarming age.

When young Lumsden left his Lily, it was in the midst of a group of girls, collected together in the interval between two dances, lamenting that the programme was nearly exhausted, and that mamma had made a point of not staying later than three o'clock. "Because it disturbs papa!" said one of them indignantly, "though we all know he would go on snoring if the Castle rock were to fall!" They all said papa and mamma in those days.

"But mamma says there are so many parties going," said another; "a ball for almost every night next week; and what are we to do for dresses? tarlatans in rags with two, and even a silk slip is shameful to look at at the end of a week."

"Lily has nothing to do but to get another whenever she wants it," said Jeanie Scott.

"And throw away the old ones, she's such a grand lady," said Maggie Lauder.

"Hold all your tongues," said Bella Rutherford, "it

does her this good, that she thinks less about it than any of us."

"She has other things to think of," cried another; and there was a laugh and a general chorus, "So have we all." "But, Lily! is Sir Robert as dour as ever?" one of the rosy creatures cried.

"I don't think I am going to any more of your balls," said Lily; "I'm tired of dancing. We just dance, dance, and think of nothing else."

"What else should we think about at our age!" said Mary Bell, opening wide a pair of round blue eyes.

"We'll have plenty of other things to think about, mamma says, and that soon enough," said Alison Murray, who was just going to be married, with a sigh. "But there's the music striking up again, and who's my partner? for I'm sure I don't remember whether it's Alick Scott, or Johnnie Beatoun, or Bob Murray. Oh! is it you, Bob?" she said, with relief, putting her hand upon an outstretched arm. They were almost all in a similar perplexity, except, indeed, such as had their own special partner waiting. Lily was almost glad that it was not Ronald but a big young Macgregor who led her off to the top of the room to a sedate quadrille. The waltz existed in those days, but it was still an indulgence, and looked upon with but scant favour by the mothers. The elder folks were scandalised by the close contact, and even the girls liked best that it should be an accepted lover, or, at the least, a brother or cousin whose arm encircled their waist. So they still preferred dances in which there were "figures," and took their pleasure occasionally in a riotous "Lancers" or a merry reel, with great relief. Lily was young enough to forget herself

and her troubles, even in the slow movement of the quadrilles, with everybody else round chattering and beaming and forgetting when it was their turn to dance. But she said to herself that it was the last. Of all these dances of which they spoke she would see none. When the others gathered, delighted to enjoy themselves, she would be gazing across the dark moor, hearing nothing but the hum of insects and the cry of the curlew, or, perhaps, a watchful blackbird in the little clump of trees. Well! for to-night she would forget.

I need not say it was Lumsden who saw her to her own door on the other side of the square. No one there would have been such a spoil-sport as to interfere with his right, whatever old Sir Robert might say. They stole out in a lull of the leave-taking, when the most of the people were gone, and others lingered for just this "one more" for which the girls pleaded. The misty moonlight filled the square, and made all the waiting carriages look like ghostly equipages bent upon some mystic journey in the middle of the night. They paused at the corner of the square, where the road led down to the pleasant Meadows, all white and indefinite in the mist, spreading out into the distance. Lumsden would fain have drawn her away into a little further discussion, wandering under the trees, where they would have met nobody at that hour; but Lily was not bold enough to walk in the Meadows between two and three in the morning. She was willing, however, to walk up and down a little on the other side of the square before she said good-night. Nobody saw them there, except some of the coachmen on the boxes, who were too sleepy to mind who passed, and Robina, who had silently opened

the door and was waiting for her mistress. Robina was several years older than Lily, and had relinquished all thoughts of a sweetheart in her own person. She stood concealing herself in the doorway, ready, if any sound should be made within which denoted wakefulness on the part of Sir Robert, to snatch her young lady even from her lover's arms; and watching, with very mingled feelings, the pair half seen—the white figure congenial to the moonlight and the dark one just visible, like a prop to a flower. “Lily’s her name and Lily’s her nature,” said Robina to herself, with a little moisture in her kind eyes; “but oh! is he worthy of her, is he worthy of her?” This was too deep a question to be solved by anything but time and proof, which are the last things to satisfy the heart. At last there was a lingering parting, and Lily stole in, in her white wraps, all white from top to toe, into the dark and silent house.

CHAPTER II.

LILY'S room was faintly illuminated by a couple of candles, which, as it was a large room with gloomy furniture, made little more than darkness visible, except about the table on which they stood, the white cover of which, and the dressing-glass that stood upon it, diffused the light a little. It was not one of those dainty chambers in which our Lilys of the present days are housed. One side of the room was occupied by a large wardrobe of almost black mahogany, polished and gleaming with many years' manipulation, but out of reach of these little lights. The bed was a large four-post bed, which once had been hung with those moreen curtains, which were the triumph of the bad taste of our fathers, and had their appropriate accompaniment in black hair-cloth sofas and chairs. Lily had been allowed to substitute for the moreen white dimity, which was almost as bad, and hung stiff as a board from the valance ornamented with bobs of cotton tassels. She could not help it if that was the best that could be done in her day. Everything, except the bed, was dark, and the distance of the large room was black as night, except for the relief of an open door into a small dressing-room which Robina occupied, and in which a weird little dip candle with a long wick unsnuffed was burning feebly. Nobody can imagine nowadays what it was to have candles which

required snuffing, and which, if not attended to, soon began to bend and topple over with a small red column of consumed wick, in the midst of a black and smoking crust. A silver snuffer tray is quite a pretty article nowadays, and proves that its possessor had a grandfather; but then! The candles on the dressing-table, however, were carefully snuffed, and burnt as brightly as was possible for them while Robina took off her young mistress's great white Indian mantle, with its silken embroideries, and undid her little pearl necklace. Lily had the milk-white skin of a Scotch girl, and the rose-tints; but she was brown in hair and eyes, as most people are in all countries, and had no glow of golden hair about her. She was tired and pale that night, and the tears were very near her eyes.

"Ye've been dancing more than ye should; these waltzes and new-fangled things are real exhaustin'," Robina said.

"I have been dancing very little," said Lily; "my heart was too heavy. How can you dance when you have got your sentence in your pocket, and the police coming for you to haul you away to the Grassmarket by skreigh of day?"

"Hoot, away with ye," cried Robina, "what nonsense are ye talking? My bonnie dear, ye'll dance many a night yet at a' the assemblies, and go in on your ain man's airm—"

"It's you that's talking nonsense now. On whose arm? Have we not got our sentence, you and me, to be banished to Dalrugas to-morrow, and never to come back—unless—"

"Ay, Miss Lily, unless!—but that's a big word."

"It is, perhaps, a big word; but it cannot touch me, that am not of the kind that breaks my word or changes my mind," said Lily, raising her head with a gesture full of pride.

"Oh, Miss Lily, my dear! I ken what the Ramsays are!" cried the faithful maid, "but there might be two meanings till it," and she breathed a half sigh over her young mistress's head.

"You think, I know—and maybe I once thought too; but you may dismiss that from your mind as I do," said the girl with a shake of the head as if she were shaking something off. And then she added, clasping her hands together, "Oh, if I were strong enough just to say 'I am not caring about your money. I am not afraid to be poor. I can work for my own living, and you can give your siller where you please!' Oh, Beenie, that is what I want to say!"

"No, my darlin', no; you must not say that. Oh, you must not say that!" Robina cried.

"And why? I must not do this or the other, and who are you that dares to say so? I am my mother's daughter, as well as my father's, and if that's not as good blood, it has a better heart. I might go there—they would not refuse me."

"Without a penny," said Robina. "Can you think o't, Miss Lily? And is that no banishment, too?"

Lily rose from her chair, shaking herself free from her maid, with her pretty hair all hanging about her shoulders. It was pretty hair, though it was brown like everybody else's, full of incipient curl, the crispness yet softness of much life. She shook it about her with her rapid movement, bringing out all the undertones of colour, and

its wavy freedom gave an additional sparkle to her eyes and animation to her look. "Without a penny!" she cried. "And who is caring about your pennies?—you and the like of you, but not me, Beenie—not me! What do I care for the money, the filthy siller, the pound notes, all black with the hands they've come through! Am I minding about the grand dinners that are never done, and the parties, where you never see those you want to see, and the balls, where— Just a little cottage, a drink of milk, and a piece of cake off the girdle, and plenty to do, it's that that would please me!"

"Oh, my bonnie Miss Lily!" was all that Beenie said.

"And when I see," said the girl, pacing up and down the room, her hair swinging about her shoulders, her white undergarments all afloat about her in the energy of her movements, "that—other folk think of that first! Whatever you do, you must not risk your fortune. Whatever you have to bear, you must not offend your uncle, for he has the purse strings in his hand. Oh, my uncle, my uncle! It's not," she cried, "that I wouldn't be fond of him if he would let me, and care for what he said, and do what he wanted as far as I was able: but his money! I wish—oh, I wish his money—his money—was all at the bottom of the sea!"

"Whist! whist!" cried Beenie, with a movement of horror; "oh, but that's a dreadful wish. You would, maybe, no like it yourself, Miss Lily, for all you think now; but what would auld Sir Robert be without his money? Instead of a grand gentleman, as he is, he would just be a miserable auld man. He couldna bide it; he would be shootin' himself or something terrible.

His fine dinners and his house, and his made dishes and his wine that costs as much as would keep twa-three honest families! Oh, ye dinna mean it, ye dinna mean it, Miss Lily! You dinna ken what you are saying! ye wouldna like it yoursel', and oh, to think o' him."

Lily threw herself down in the big chair, which rose above her head with its high back, and brought out all her whiteness against its sober cover. She was silenced—obviously by the thought thus suggested of Sir Robert as a poor man, which was an absurdity—and perhaps secretly, in that innermost seclusion of the heart, which even its possessor does not always realise, by a faint chill of wonder whether she would indeed and really like to be poor, as she protested she should. It was quite true that a drink of milk and a piece of oat-cake appeared to her as much nourishment as any person of refinement need care for. In the novels of her day, which always affect the young mind, all the heroines lived upon such fare, and were much superior to beef and mutton. But there were undoubtedly others—Robina, for instance; although no thought of parting from Robina had ever crossed Lily's mind, as a necessary part of poverty. But she was silenced by these thoughts. She had not indeed ever confessed in so many words even to Robina, scarcely to herself, that it was Ronald who cared for the money, and that it was the want of any impulse on his part to do without it that carried so keen a pang to her heart. Had he cried, "A fig for the money," then it might have been her part to temporise and be prudent. The impetuosity, the recklessness, should not, she felt, be on her side.

It was on the very next day that her decision was to be made—and it had not been till all other means had failed that Sir Robert had thus put the matter to the touch. He had opposed her in many gentler ways before it came to that. Sir Robert was not a brute or a tyrant—very far from it. He was an old gentleman of fine manners, pluming himself on his successes with the “other sex,” and treating all women with a superfine courtesy, which only one here and there divined to conceal contempt. Few men—one may say with confidence, no elderly man without wife or daughters—has much respect for women in general. It is curious, it is to some degree reciprocal, it is of course always subject to personal exceptions; yet it is the rule between the two sections of humanity which nevertheless have to live in such intimate intercourse with each other. In an old bachelor like Sir Robert, and one too who was conscious of having imposed upon many women, this prepossession was more strong than among men of more natural relationships. And Lily, who was only his niece, and had not lived with him until very lately, had not overcome all prejudices in his mind, as it is sometimes given to a daughter to do. He had thought first that he could easily separate her from the young man who did not please him, and bestow her, as he had a right to bestow his probable heiress, on whom he pleased. When this proved ineffectual, he cursed her obstinacy, but reflected that it was a feature in women, and, therefore, nothing to be surprised at. They were always taken in by fictitious qualities—who could know it better than he? and considered it a glory to stick to a suitor unpalatable to their belongings. And then he had

threatened her with the loss of the fortune which she had been brought up to expect. "See if this fine fellow you think so much of will have you without your money," he said. Lily had never in so many words put Lumsden to the trial, never proposed to him to defy Sir Robert; but she had made many an attempt to discover his thoughts, and even to push him to this rash solution, and, with an ache at her heart, had felt that there was at least a doubt whether the fine fellow would think so much of her if she were penniless. She had never put it to the test, partly because she dared not, though she had not been able to refrain from an occasional burst of defiance and hot entreaty to Sir Robert to keep his money to himself. And now she was to decide for herself—to give Ronald over for ever, or to give over Edinburgh and the society in which she might meet him, and keep her love at the cost of martyrdom in her uncle's lonely shooting box on the moors. There was, of course, a second alternative—that which she had so often thought of; to refuse unconditionally, to leave Sir Robert's house, to seek refuge in some cottage, to live on milk and oatcake, and provide for herself. If the alternative had been to run away with her lover, to be married to him in humility and poverty, to keep his house and cook his dinners, and iron his linen, Lily would not have hesitated for a moment. But he had not asked her to do this—had not dreamt of it, it seemed; and to run away alone and work for herself would be, Lily felt, to expose him to much animadversion as well as herself; and, most of all, it would betray fully to herself and to her uncle, with that sneer on his face, the certainty that Ronald would not risk having her without her money, that discovery

which she held at arm's length and would not consent to make herself sure of.

All these thoughts were tumultuous in her mind as she opened her eyes to the light of a new day. This was the final moment; the turning point of her life. She thought at first when she woke that it was still the same misty moonlight on which she had shut her eyes, and that there must still be some hours between her and the day. But it was only an easterly haar with which the air was full—a state of atmosphere not unknown in Edinburgh, and which wraps the landscape in a blinding shroud as of white wool, obliterating every feature in a place which has so many. Arthur's Seat and Salisbury Craigs and the Castle rock had all disappeared in it, from those who were in a position to see them; and here, in George Square, even the brown houses opposite had gone out of sight, and the trees in the garden loomed dimly like ghosts, a branch thrust out here and there. Lily asked herself, was it still night? And then her mind awoke to a state of the atmosphere not at all unusual, and a sense that the moment of her fate had arrived, and that everything must be settled for her for good or for evil this day.

She was very quiet, and said scarcely anything even to Robina, who dressed her young mistress with the greatest care, bringing out a dress of which Sir Robert had expressed his approval, without consulting Lily, who indeed paid little attention to this important matter. Considering the visions of poverty and independence that ran in her mind, it was wonderful how peaceably she resigned herself to Robina's ministrations. Sometimes, when a fit of that independence seized her, she

would push Robina away and do everything for herself. Beenie much exaggerated the misfortunes of the result in such moments. "Her hair just a' comes down tumbling about her shoulders in five minutes," she said, which was not true; though Lily did not deny that she was not equal to the elaborate braids which were in fashion at the moment, and could not herself plait her hair in anything more than three strands, while Beenie was capable of seven, or any number more.

But to-day she was quite passive, and took no interest in her appearance. Her hair was dressed in a sort of coronet, which was a mode only used on grand occasions. Ordinarily it was spread over the back of the head in woven coils and circles. There was not anything extraordinary in Lily's beauty. It was the beauty of youth, and freshness, and health, a good complexion, good eyes, and features not much to speak of. People did not follow her through the streets, nor stand aside to make way for her when she entered a room. In Edinburgh there were hundreds as pretty as she; and yet, when all was said, she was a pretty creature, good enough and fair enough to be a delight and pride to anyone who loved her. She had innumerable faults, but she was all the sweeter for them, and impulses of temper, swift wrath, and indignation, and impatience, which proved her to be anything but perfect. Sometimes she would take you up at a word and misinterpret you altogether. In all things she was apt to be too quick, to run away with a meaning before you, if you were of slow movement, had got it half expressed. And this and many other things about her were highly provoking, and called forth answering impatience from others. But

for all this she was a very lovable, and, as other girls said, nice, girl. She raised no jealousies; she entertained no spite. She was always natural and spontaneous, and did nothing from calculation, not even so much as the putting on of a dress. It did not occur to her even to think, to inquire whether she was looking her best when the hour had come at which she was to go to Sir Robert. Robina took her by the shoulders and turned her slowly round before the glass; but Lily did not know why. She gave her faithful servant a faint smile over her own shoulder in the mirror, but it did not enter into her mind that it was expedient to look her best when she went downstairs to her uncle. If any one had put it into words she would have asked what did he care? Would he so much as notice her dress? It was ridiculous to think of such a thing, an old man like Sir Robert, with his head full of different matters. Thus, without any thought on that subject, she went slowly downstairs—not flying, as was her wont—very sedately, as if she were counting every step; for was it not her fate and Ronald's which was to be settled to-day?

CHAPTER III.

"So you are there, Lily," Sir Robert said.

"Yes, uncle, I am here."

"There is one thing about you," he said, with a laugh "you never shirk. Now, judicious shirking is not a bad thing. I might have forgotten all about it—"

"But I couldn't forget," said Lily, firmly. These words, however, roused her to sudden self-reproach. If she had not been so exact, perhaps the crisis might have been tided over and nothing happened. It was just like her! supposing her little affairs to be of more importance than anything else in the world! This roused her from the half passive condition in which she had spent the morning, the feeling that everything depended on her uncle, and nothing on herself.

"Now that you are here," he said, not at all unkindly, "you may as well sit down. While you stand there I feel that you have come to scold me for some fault of mine, which is a reversal of the just position, don't you think?"

"No, uncle," replied Lily, "of course I have not come to scold you, that would be ridiculous: but I am not come to be scolded either, for I have not done anything wrong."

"We'll come to that presently. Sit down, sit down," he said with impatience. Lily placed herself on the

chair he pushed towards her, and then there was a moment's silence. Sir Robert was an old man (in Lily's opinion) and she was a young girl, but they were antagonists not badly matched, and he had a certain respect for the pluck and firmness of this little person who was not afraid of him. They were indeed so evenly matched, that there ensued a little pause as they both looked at each other in the milky white daylight, full of mist and cold, which filled the great windows. Sir Robert had a fire, though fires had been given up in the house. It burned with a little red point, sulky and smouldering, as fires have a way of doing in the summer. The room was large and sombre, with pale green walls hung with some full-length portraits, the furniture all large, heavy and dark. A white bust of himself stood stern upon a black pedestal in a corner—so white that, amid all the sober lines of the room, it caught the eye constantly. And Sir Robert was not a handsome man. His features were blunt and his air homely, his head was not adapted for marble. In that hard material it looked frowning, severe and merciless. The bust had lived in this room longer than Sir Robert had done, and Lily had derived her first impressions of him from its unyielding face. The irregularities of the real countenance leant to humour and a shrewdness which was not unkindly; but there was no relenting in the marble head.

"Well," he said at last, "now we've met to have it out, Lily: you take me at my word, and it is best so. How old are you now?"

"I don't see," said Lily, breathlessly, "what that can have to do with it, uncle! but I'm twenty-two—or, at

least, I shall be on the 20th of August, and that is not far away."

"No, it is not far away. Twenty-two—and I am—well, sixty-two we may say, with allowances. That is a great difference between people that meet to discuss an important question—on quite an equal footing, Lily, as you suppose."

"I never pretended—to be your equal, uncle!"

"No, I don't suppose so—not in words, not in experience, and such like—but in intention and all that, and in knowing what suits yourself."

Lily made no reply, but she looked at him—silent, not yielding—tapping her foot unconsciously on the carpet, nervous, yet firm, not disposed to give way a jot, though she recognised a certain truth in what he said.

"This gives you, you must see, a certain advantage to begin with," said Sir Robert, "for you are firmly fixed upon one thing, whatever I say or anyone—and determined not to budge from your position; whereas I am quite willing to hear reason, if there is any reason to show."

"Uncle!" Lily said—and then closed her lips and returned to her silence. It was hard for her to keep silent with her disposition, and yet she suddenly perceived, with one of those flashes of understanding which sometimes came to her, that silence could not be controverted, whereas words under Sir Robert's skilful attack would probably topple over at once, like a house of cards.

"Well?" he said. While she, poor child, was panting and breathless, he was quite cool and collected. At

present he rather enjoyed the sight of the little thing's tricks and devices, and was amused to watch how far her natural skill, and that intuitive cunning which such a man believes every woman to possess, would carry her. He was a little provoked that she did not follow that impetuous exclamation—"Uncle!" with anything more.

"Well?" he repeated, wooing her as he hoped to destruction. "What more? Unless you state your case, how am I to find out whether there is any justice in it or not?"

"Uncle," said Lily, "I did not come to state my case, which would not become me. I came because you objected to me, to hear what you wanted me to do."

"By Jove!" said Sir Robert, with a laugh—and then he added, "To be so young you are a very cool hand, my dear."

"How am I a cool hand? I am not cool at all. I am very anxious; it does not matter much to you, Uncle Robert, what you do with me; but," said Lily, tears springing to her eyes, "it will matter a great deal to me."

"You little—!" He could not find an epithet that suited, so left the adjective by itself, in sheer disability to express himself. He would have said hussy had he been an Englishman. He was tempted to say cutty, being a Scot—innocent epithets enough, both, but sufficient to make that little—!? flare up. "You mean," he said, "I suppose, that you have nothing to do with it, and that the whole affair is in my hands."

"Yes, uncle, I think it is," said Lily, very sedately.

He looked at her again with another ejaculation on his lips, and then he laughed.

"Well, my dear," he said, "if that is the case, we can make short work of it—as you are in such a submissive frame of mind and have no will or intentions on your own part."

Here Lily's impatient spirit got the better of the hasty impulse of policy which she had taken up by sudden inspiration. "I never said that," she cried.

"Then you will be so good as to explain to me what you did say—or rather what you meant, which is more important still," Sir Robert said.

"I meant—just what I have always meant," said Lily, drawing back her chair a little and fixing her eyes upon her foot which beat the floor with a nervous movement.

"And what is that?" he asked.

Lily drew back a little more, her foot ceased to tap, her hands clasped each other. She looked up into his face with half reproachful eyes full of meaning. "Oh, Uncle Robert, you know!"

Sir Robert jumped up from his chair, and then sat down again. Demonstrations of wrath were of no use. He felt inclined to cry "You little cutty!" again, but did not. He puffed out a quick breath, which was a sign of great impatience yet self-repression. "You mean, I suppose, that things are exactly as they were—that you mean to pay no attention to my representations, that you choose your own will above mine—notwithstanding that I have complete power over you, and can do with you what I will?"

"Nobody can do that," said Lily only half aloud. "I am not a doll," she said, "Uncle Robert. You have the power—and I don't like to disobey you."

"But do it all the same," he cried.

"Not if I can help it. I would like to do it. I would like to be independent. It seems dreadful that one should be obliged to do not what one wishes, but what another person wills. But you have the power—"

"Of the ways and means," he said; "I have the purse-strings in my hand."

It was Lily's turn now to start to her feet. "Oh, how mean of you, how base of you!" she said. "You, a great man and a soldier, and me only a girl. To threaten me with your purse-strings! As if I cared for your purse-strings. Give it all away from me; give it all—that's what I should like best. I will go away with Beenie, and we'll sew, or do something else for our living. I'm very fond of poultry, I could be a henwife; or there are many other things that I could do. Give it all away! Tie them up tight. I just hate your money and your purse-strings. I wish they were all at the bottom of the sea."

"You would find things very different if they were, I can tell you," he said, with a snort.

"Oh, yes, very different. I would be free. I would take my own way. I would have nobody to tyrannise over me. Oh, uncle! forgive me! forgive me! I did not mean to say that! If you were poor I would take care of you. I would remember you were next to my father, and I would do everything you could say."

He kept his eyes fixed on her as she stood thus, defiant yet compunctious before him. "I don't doubt for a moment you would do everything that was most senseless and imprudent," he said.

Then Lily dropped into her chair and cried a little

—partly that she could not help it, partly that it was a weapon of war like another—and gained a little time. But Sir Robert was not moved by her crying; she had not, indeed, expected that he would be.

“I don’t see what all this has to do with it,” he said. “Consider this passage of arms over, and let us get to business, Lily. It was necessary there should be a flash in the pan to begin.”

Lily dried her eyes; she set her little mouth much as Sir Robert set his, and then said, in a small voice, “I am quite ready, Uncle Robert;” looking not unlike the bust as she did so. He did not look at all like the bust, for there was a great deal of humour in his face. He thought he saw through all this little flash in the pan, and that it had been intended from the beginning as a preface of operations and by way of subduing him to her will. In all of which he was quite wrong.

“I am glad to hear it, Lily. Now I want you to be reasonable; the thunder is over and the air is clearer. You want to marry a man of whom I don’t approve.”

“One word,” she said, with great dignity. “I am wanting to marry—nobody. There is plenty of time.”

“I accept the correction. You want to carry on a love affair—which is what you prefer at this moment. It is more fun than marrying, and in that way you get all the advantages I can give you, and the advantage of a lover’s attentions into the bargain. I congratulate you, my dear, on making the best, as the preacher says, of both worlds.”

Lily flushed and clasped her hands together, and there came from her expanded nostrils what in Sir Robert’s case we have called a snort of passion. Lily’s nostrils

were small and pretty, and delicate. This was a puff of heated breath, and no more.

"Eh?" he said; but she mastered herself and said nothing, which made it more difficult for him to go on. Finally, however, he resumed.

"You think," he said, "that it will be more difficult for me to restrain you if you or your lover have no immediate intention of marrying. And probably he, for I do him the justice to say he is a very acute fellow, sees the advantage of that. But it will not do for me. I must have certainty one way or another. I am not going to give the comfort of my life over into your silly hands. No, I don't even say that you are sillier than most of your age, on the contrary; but I don't mean," he added deliberately, "to put my peace of mind into your hands. You will give me your word to give up the lad Lumsden, or else you will pack off without another word to Dalrugas. It is a comfortable house, and Dougal and his wife will be very attentive to you. What's in a locality? George's Square is pleasant enough, but it's prose of the deepest dye for a lady in love. You'll find nothing but poetry on my moor. Poetry," he added with a laugh, "sunsets such as you will rarely match, and moonlight nights and all the rest of it; just the very thing for a love-lorn maiden; but very little else, I allow. And what do you want more? plenty of time to think upon the happy man."

His laugh was fiendish, Lily thought, who held herself with both her hands to keep still and to retain command of herself. She made no answer, though the self-restraint was almost more than she could bear.

"Well," he said, after a pause, "is this what you are

going to decide upon? There is something to balance all these advantages. While you are thinking of him he will probably *not* return the compliment. Out of sight, out of mind. He will most likely find another Lily not so closely guarded as you are, and while you are out of the way he will transfer his attentions to her. It will be quite natural. There are few men in the world that would not do the same. And while you are gazing over the moor, thinking of him, he will be taking the usual means to indemnify himself and forget you."

"I am not afraid," said Lily, tersely.

"Oh, you are not afraid? It's little you know of men, my dear. Lumsden's a clever, ambitious young fellow. He perhaps believes he's fond of you. He is fond of anything that will help him on in the world and give him what he wants—which is a helping hand in life, and ease of mind and money to tide him over till he makes himself known. Oh, he'll succeed in the end, there is little doubt of that; but he shall not succeed at my expense. Now, Lily, do not sit and glare, like a waxen image, but give me an answer like a sensible girl, as you can be, if you like. Will you throw away your happy life, and society and variety and pleasure, and your balls and parties—all for the sake of a man that the moment your back is turned will think no more of you?"

"Uncle," said Lily, clearing her throat. But she could not raise her voice, which extreme irritation, indignation, and the strong effort of self-restraint seemed to have stifled. She made an effort, but produced nothing but a hoarse repetition of his name.

"I hope I have touched you," he said. "Come, my

dear, be a sensible lassie, and be sure I am speaking for your good. There are more fish in the sea than ever came out in a net. I will find you a better man than Lumsden, and one with a good house to take you home to, and not a penniless—”

“Stop,” she cried, with an angry gesture. “Stop! do you think I am wanting a man? Me! Just any man, perhaps you think, no matter whom? Oh, if I were only a laddie instead of a useless girl, you would never, never dare, great man as you are, to speak like that to me?”

“Certainly I should not,” he said with a laugh, “for you would have more sense, and would not think any woman was worth going into exile for. But, girl as you are, Lily, the choice is in your own hands. You can have, not love in a cottage, but love on a moor, which soon will be unrequited love, and that, we all know, is the most tragic and interesting of all.”

“Uncle,” said Lily, slowly recovering herself. “Do you think it is a fine thing for a man like you, a grand gentleman, and old, and that knows everything, to make a jest and a mockery of one that is young like me, and has no words to make reply? Is it a joke to think of me breaking my heart, as you say, among all the bonnie sunsets and the moonlight nights and the lonely, lonely moor? I may have to do it, if it's your will; but it's not for the like of you that have your freedom and can do what you choose, to make a mock at those that are helpless like me.”

“Helpless!” he said. “Nothing of the sort; it is all in your own hands.”

And then there was again a pause. He thought she was making up her mind to submit to his will. And

she was bursting with the effort to contain herself, and all her indignation and wrath. Her pride would not let her burst forth into cries and tears, but it was with the greatest watchfulness upon herself that she kept in these wild expressions of emotion, and the hot refusals that pressed to her lips. Refusals to obey him, to be silenced by him; to be sentenced to unnatural confinement and banishment, and dreary exile. Why should one human creature have such power of life and death over another? Her whole being revolted in a passion of restrained impatience, and rage and fear.

"Well," he said lightly, "which is it to be? Don't trifle with your own comfort, Lily. Just give me the answer that you will see no more of young Lumsden. Give him no more encouragement; think of him no more. That is all I ask. Only give me your promise—I put faith in you. Think of him no more; that is all I ask."

"All you ask, only that," said Lily, in her fury. "Only that! Oh, it's not much, is it? not much, only that." She laughed, too, with a sort of echo of his laugh; but somehow he did not find it to his mind.

"That is all," he said gravely; "and I don't think that it is very much to ask, considering that you owe everything to me."

"It would have been better for me if I had owed you nothing, uncle," said Lily. "Why did you ever take any heed of me? I would have been earning my own bread and had my freedom, and lived my own life if you had left me as I was."

"This is what one gets," he said, as if to himself, with a smile, "for taking care of other people's children. But we need not fall into general reflections nor yet into

recriminations. I would probably not do it again if I had it to do a second time; but the thing I want from you at the present moment is merely a yes or no."

"No!" Lily said, almost inaudibly; but her tightly-closed lips, her resolute face, said it for her without need of any sound.

"No?" he repeated, half incredulous; then with a nod, flinging back his head, "Well, my dear, you must have your wilful way. Dalrugus will daily be growing bonnier and bonnier at this season of the year: and to-morrow you will get ready to go away."

CHAPTER IV.

"I HAVE been a fool," said Lily. "I have not said anything that I meant to say. I had a great many good reasons all ready, and I did not say one of them. I just said silly things. He played upon me like a fiddle; he made me so angry I could not endure myself, and then I had either to hold my tongue or say things that were silly and that I ought not to have said."

"Oh, dear me, dear me," cried Robina, "I just thought you would do that. If I had only been behind the door to give ye a look, Miss Lily. Ye are too impetuous when you are left to yourself."

"I was not impetuous; I was just silly," Lily said. "He provoked me till I did not know what I was saying, and then I held my tongue at the wrong places. But it would just have come to the same whatever I had said. He'll not yield, and I'll not yield, and what

can we do but clash? We're to start off for Dalrugas to-morrow, and that's all that we have to think of now."

"Oh, Miss Lily!" cried Robina—she wrung her hands, and, with a look of awe, added—"It's like thae poor Poles in *Elizabeth*, going off in chains to that place they call Siberée, where there's nothing but snow and ice, and wild, wild forests. Oh, my bonnie lamb! I mind the woods up yonder where it's dark i' the mid of day. And are ye to be banished there, you that are just in your bloom, and everybody at your feet? Oh, Miss Lily, it canna be! it canna be!"

"It will have to be," said Lily, resolutely, "and we must make the best of it. Take all the working things you can think of; I've been idle, and spent my time in nothings. I'll learn all your bonnie lace-stitches, Beenie, and how to make things, and embroideries, like Mary Queen of Scots. We'll be two prisoners, and Dougal will turn the key on us every night, and we'll make friends with somebody like Roland, the page, that will make false keys and let us down from the window, with horses waiting; and then we'll career across the country in the dead of night, and folk will take us for ghosts; and then—we'll maybe ride on broomsticks, and fly up to the moon!" cried Lily, with a burst of laughter, which ended in a torrent of tears.

"Oh, my bonnie dear! oh, my lamb!" cried Beenie, taking the girl's head upon her ample breast. It is not to be imagined that these were hysterics, though hysterics were the fashion of the time, and the young ladies of the day indulged in them freely at any contrariety. Lily was over-excited and worn-out, and she had broken down for the moment. But in a few minutes she had

raised her head, pushed Beenie away, and got up with bright eyes to meet her fate.

"Take books, too," she cried, "as many as you can, and perhaps he'll let us keep our subscription to the library, and they can send us things by the coach. And take all my pencils and my colours. I'll maybe turn into a great artist on the moors that Uncle Robert says are so bonnie. He went on about his sunsets and his moonlights till he nearly drove me mad!" cried Lily, mocking. "Oh, Beenie, what hard hearts they have, these old men!"

"I would just like," cried the faithful maid, "to have twa-three words with him. Oh, I should like to have twa-three words with him, just him and me, by our twa sel's!"

"And much good that would do! He would just turn you outside in with his little finger," said Lily, in high scorn; but, naturally, Robina was not of that opinion. She was ready to go to the stake for her mistress, and facing Sir Robert in his den was not a bad version of going to the stake. It might procure her instant dismissal for anything Beenie knew; he might tell old Haygate, the old soldier-servant, who was now his butler and an Englishman, consequently devoid of sympathy, to put her to the door; anyhow, he would scathe her with satirical words and that look which even Lily interpreted as mocking, and which is the most difficult of all things to bear. But Beenie had a great confidence that there were "twa-three things" that nobody could press upon Sir Robert's attention but herself. She thought of it during the morning hours to the exclusion of everything else, and finally, after luncheon was over, when

Lily was occupied with some youthful visitors, Beenie, with a beating heart, put her plan into execution. Haygate was out of the way, too, the Lord be praised! He had started out upon some mission connected with the wine-cellar; and Thomas, the footman, was indigenous, had been Tommy to Robina from his boyhood, and was so, she said, like a boy of her own. He would never put her to the door, whatever Sir Robert might say. She went down, accordingly, to the dining-room, after the master of the house had enjoyed his good lunch and his moment of somnolence after it (which he would not for the world have admitted to be a nap), and tapped lightly, tremulously, with all her nerves in a twitter, at the door. To describe what was in Beenie's heart, when she opened it in obedience to his call to come in, was more than words are capable of; it was like going to the stake.

"Oh, Beenie, so it is you," the master said.

"Deed, it's just me, Sir Robert. I thought if I might say a word—"

"Oh, say a dozen if you like; but, mind, I am going out, and I have no time for more."

"Yes, Sir Robert." Beenie came inside the door, and closed it softly after her. She then took up the black silk apron which she wore, denoting her rank as lady's maid, to give her a countenance, and made an imaginary frill upon it with her hands. "I just thought," she said, with her head bent and her eyes fixed on this useful occupation, "that I would like to say twa-three words about Miss Lily, Sir Robert—"

"Oh," he said, "and what might you have to say about Miss Lily? You should know more about her, it

is true, than any of us. Has she sent you to say that she has recovered her senses, and is going to behave like a girl of sense, as I always took her to be?"

Beenie raised her eyes from her fantastic occupation, and looked at Sir Robert. She shook her head. She formed her lips into a round "No," pushing them forth to emphasise the syllable. "Eh, Sir Robert," she said at last, "you're a clever man—you understand many a thing that's just Greek and Hebrew to the likes of us; but ye dinna understand a lassie's heart. How should ye?" said Beenie, compassionately shaking her head again.

Sir Robert's luncheon had been good; he had enjoyed his nap; he was altogether in a good humour. "Well," he said, "if you can enlighten me on that point, Beenie, fire away."

"Weel, Sir Robert: do ye no think you're just forcing her more and more into it, to make her suffer for her lad, and to have nothing to do but think upon him and weary for him away yonder, on yon solitary moor? Eh, it's like driving her to the wilderness, or away to Siberée, that awfu' place where they send the Poles, as ye will read in *Elizabeth*, to make them forget their country, and where they just learn to think upon it more and more. Eh, Sir Robert, we're awfu' perverse in that way! I would have praised him up to her, and said there was no man like him in the world. I would have said he was just the one who cared nothing for siller, that would have taken her in her shift—begging your pardon for sic a common word—I would have hurried her on to fix the day, and made everything as smooth as velvet; and then, just as keen as she is for it now, I would have looked to see her against it then."

"I allow," said Sir Robert, with a laugh, "that you have a cloud of witnesses on your side; but I am not quite sure that I put faith in them. If I were to hurry her on to fix the day, as you say, I would get rid, no doubt, of the trouble, but I'm much afraid that Lily, instead of starting off on the other tack, would take me at my word."

"Sir," said Beenie, in a lowered voice, coming a step nearer, "if ye were to leave it to him to show her the contrary, it would be more effectual than anything you could say."

"So," said Sir Robert, with a long whistle of surprise, "you trust him no more than I do? I always thought you were a woman of sense."

"I'm saying nothing about that, Sir Robert," Beenie replied.

"But, don't ye see, you silly woman, that he would take my favour for granted in that case, and would not show her to the contrary—but would marry her in as great haste as we liked, feeling sure that I had committed myself, and would not then draw back?"

"He would do ye nae justice, Sir Robert, if he thought that."

"What do you mean, you libellous person? You think I would encourage her in her folly in the hope of changing her mind, and then deceive and abandon her when she had followed my advice? No," he said, "I am not so bad as that."

"You should ken best, Sir Robert," said Beenie, "but for me, I would not say. But if ye will just permit me one more word. Here she has plenty of things to think of—her parties and her dress, and her friends

and her other partners. There's three young leddies up the stair at this moment talking a' the nonsense that comes into their heads—but there, she would have no person—”

“Not a soul, except Dougal and his wife,” said Sir Robert, with a chuckle.

“And nothing to think of but just—him. Oh, Sir Robert, think what ye are driving the bairn to! No diversions and no distraction, but just to think upon him night and day. There's things she finds to object to in him when he's by her side—just like you and me. But when she's there she'll think and think upon him till she makes him out to be an angel o' light. He will just get to be the only person in the world. He will write to her—”

“That he shall not do! Dougal shall have orders to stop every letter.”

Beenie smiled a calm, superior smile. “And ye think Dougal—or any man in the world—can keep a lad and lass from communication. Eh, Sir Robert, you're a clever man! but just as ignorant, as ignorant as any bairn.”

Sir Robert was much amused, but he began to get a little impatient. “If they can find means of communicating in spite of the solitude and the miles of moor, and Dougal, then I really think they will deserve to be permitted to ruin all their prospects,” he said.

“Sir Robert!”

“No more,” he said. “I have already heard you with great patience, Beenie. I don't think you have thrown any new light on the subject. Go and pack your boxes; for the coach starts early to-morrow, and

you should have everything ready, both for her and yourself, to-night."

Beenie turned away to the door, and then she turned round again. She stood pinching the imaginary frill on her apron, with her head held on one side, as if to judge the effect. "Will that be your last word, Sir Robert?" she said. "She's your brother's bairn, and the only one in the family—and a tender bit thing, no used to unkindness, nor to be left all her lane as if there was naebody left in the world. Oh, think upon the bit thing sent into the wilderness! It is prophets and great men that are sent there in the way of providence, and no a slip of a lassie. Oh, Sir Robert, think again! that's no your last word?"

"Would you like me to ring for Haygate and have you turned out of the house? If you stay another minute that will be my last word."

"Na," said Beenie, "Haygate's out, Sir Robert, and Tommy's not the lad—"

"Will you go, you vixen!" Sir Robert shouted at the top of his voice.

"I'll go since I cannot help it; but if it comes to harm, oh, Sir Robert! afore God the wyte will be on your head."

Beenie dried her eyes as she went sorrowfully upstairs. "The wyte will be on his head: but oh, the sufferin' and the sorrow that will be on hers!" Beenie said to herself.

But it was evident there was no more to be said. As she went slowly upstairs with a melancholy countenance, she met at the door of the drawing-room the three young ladies who had been—according to her own de-

scription—"talking a' the nonsense that came into their heads," with Lily in the midst, who was taking leave of them. "Oh, there is Robina," they all cried out together. "Beenie will tell us what it means. What is the meaning of it all? She says she is going away. Beenie, Beenie, explain this moment. What does she mean about going away?"

"Eh, my bonnie misses," cried Beenie, "who am I that I should explain my mistress's dark sayings? I am just a servant, and ken nothing but what's said to me by the higher powers."

There was what Beenie afterwards explained as "a cackle o' laughing" over these words, which were just like Beenie, the girls said. "But what do you know from the higher powers? And why, why is Lily to be snatched away?" they said. Robina softly pushed her way through them with the superior weight of her bigness. "Ye must just ask herself, for it is beyond me," she said.

Lily rushed after her, as soon as the visitors were gone, pale with expectation. "Oh, Beenie, what did he say?" she cried.

"What did who say, Miss Lily? for I do not catch your meaning," said the faithful maid.

"Do you mean to say that you did not go downstairs!—"

"Yes, Miss Lily, I went down the stairs."

"To see my uncle?" said the girl. "I know you saw my uncle. I heard your voice murmuring, though they all talked at once. Oh, Beenie, Beenie, what did he say?"

"Since you will have it, Miss Lily, I did just see

Sir Robert. There was nobody but me in the way, and I saw your uncle. He was in a very good key after that grand dish of Scots collops, so I thought I would just ask him if it was true."

"And what did he say?"

Beenie shook her head and said "No," in dumb show, with her pursed out lips. "He just said it was your own doing, and not his," she added, after this impressive pantomime.

"Oh, how did he dare to say so! It was none of my doing—how could he say it was my doing? Was I likely to want to be banished away to Dalrugas moor, and never see a living soul?"

"He said you wouldna yield, and he wouldna yield; and in that case, Miss Lily, I ask you what could the like of me do?"

"*I* would not yield," said Lily, "oh, what a story! what a story! What have I got to yield? It was just him, him, his own self, and nobody else. He thinks more of his own will than of all the world."

"He said you would not give up your love—I am meaning young Mr. Lumsden; no, for anything he could say."

"And what would I give him up for?" cried Lily, changing in a moment from pale to red. "What do I ever see of Sir Robert, Beenie? He's not up in the morning, and he's late at night. I have heard you say yourself about that club—I see him at his lunch and that's all, and how can you talk and make great friends when your mouth is full, and him so pleased with a good dish and angry when it's not to his mind? Would I give up Ronald, that is all I have, for Sir Robert with

his mouth full? And how does he dare to ask me—him that will not do a thing for me?”

“That is just it,” said Beenie, shaking her head, “you think a’ the reason’s on your side, and he thinks a’ the reason is on his; and he’ll have his own gate and you’ll have your will, and there is no telling what is to be done between you. Oh, Miss Lily, my bonnie dear, you are but a young thing. It’s more reasonable Sir Robert should have his will than you. He’s gone through a great deal of fighting, and battles, and troubles, and what have you ever gone through but the measles and the king-cough, that couldna be helped? It’s mair becoming that you should yield to him than he should yield to you.”

“And am I not yielding to him?” said Lily. “I just do whatever he tells me. If he says, ‘You are to come out with me to dinner,’ though I know how wearisome it will be, and though I had the nicest party in the world and all my own friends, I just give in to him without a word. I wear that yellow gown he gave me, though it’s terrible to behold, just to please him. I sit and listen to all his old gentlemen grumbling, and to him paying his compliments to all his old ladies, and never laugh. Oh, Beenie, if you could hear him!” and here Lily burst into the laugh which she had previously denied herself. “But when he comes and tells me to give up Ronald for the sake of his nasty, filthy siller—”

“Miss Lily, that’s no Mr. Ronald’s opinion.”

“Oh!” cried Lily, stamping her foot upon the ground, while hot tears rushed to her eyes, “as if that did not make it a hundred times worse,” she cried.

And then there was a pause, and Beenie, with great

deliberation, began to take out a pile of dresses from the wardrobe, which she opened out and folded one after another, patting them with her plump hands upon the bed. Lily watched her for some moments in silence, and then she said with a faltering voice,—“Do you really think, then, that there is no hope?”

Robina answered in her usual way, pursing out her lips to form the “no,” which she did not utter audibly. “Unless you will yield,” she said.

“Yield—to give up Ronald? To meet him and never to speak to him? To let him think I’m a false woman, and mansworn? I will never do that,” Lily said.

“But you’ll no marry him, my lamb, without your uncle’s consent?”

“He’ll not ask me!” cried Lily, desperate. “Why do you torment me when you know that is just the worst of all? Oh, if he would try me! And who is wanting to marry him—or an man—certainly not me!”

“If you were to give your uncle your word—if you were to say, ‘We’ll just meet at kirk and market, and say good-even and good-morrow,’ but nae mair. Oh, Miss Lily, that is not much to yield to an old man.”

“I said as good as that, but he made no answer. Beenie, pack up the things and let us go quietly away, for there is no help for us in any man.”

“A’ the same, if I were you, I would try,” said Robina, taking the last word.

Lily said nothing in reply; but that night, when she was returning with Sir Robert from a solemn party to which she had accompanied him, she made in the darkness some faltering essay at submission. “I would have

to speak to him when we meet," she said, "and I would have to tell him there was to be no more—for the present. And I would not take any step without asking you, Uncle Robert."

Sir Robert nearly sprang from his carriage in indignation at this halting obedience. "If you call that giving up your will to mine, I don't call it so," he cried. "Tell him there is to be no more—for the present! That is a bonnie kind of submission to me, that will have none of him at all."

"It is all I can give," said Lily, with spirit, drawing into her own corner of the carriage. Her heart was very full, but, not to save her life could she have said more.

"Very well," said Sir Robert. "Haygate has his orders, and will see you off to-morrow. Mind you are in good time, for a coach will wait for no man, nor woman either; and I'll bid you good-bye now and a better disposition to you, and a good journey. Good-night." And at seven o'clock next morning, in the freshness of the new day, the North mail sure enough carried Lily and Robina away.

CHAPTER V.

A HIGHLAND moor is in itself a beautiful thing; when it is in full bloom of purple heather, with all those breaks and edges of emerald green which betray the bog below, with the sweet-scented gale sending forth its odour as it is crushed under foot, and the yellow gorse rising in broken lines of gold, and here and there a half-grown

rowan, with its red berries, and here and there a gleam of clear, dark water: nothing can be more full of variety and the charm of wild and abounding life. But when the sky is grey and the weather bleak, and the heather is still in the green, or dry with the grey and rustling husks of last year's bloom; when there is little colour and none of those effects of light and shade which make a drama of shifting interest upon the Highland hills and lochs, all this is very different, and the long sweep of wild and broken ground, under a low and dark sky, becomes an image of desolation instead of the fresh and blooming and fragrant moor of early autumn. Dalrugas was a tall, pinched house, with a high gable cut in those rectangular lines which are called crow steps in Scotland, rising straight up from the edge of the moor. The height and form of this gave a parsimonious and niggardly look—though the rooms were by no means contemptible within—which was increased by the small windows pierced high up in the wall. There was no garden on that side, not so much as the little plot to which even a cottage has a right. Embedded within the high, sharp-cornered walls behind was a kitchen garden or kail yard, where the commonest vegetables were grown with a border of gooseberries and a few plants of sweet william and applingie; but this was not visible to give any softness to the prospect. The heather came up uncompromisingly, with a little hillock of green turf here and there, to the very walls, which had once been white-washed, and still in their forlorn dinginess lent a little variety to the landscape; yet this did but add to the cold, pinched and resistant character of the house. It looked like a prim, ancient lady, very

spare, and holding her skirts close round her in the pride of penury and evil fortune. The door was in the outstanding gable, and admitted directly into a low passage, from which a spiral stair mounted to the rooms above. On the ground floor there was a low, dark-pannelled dining-room and library full of ancient books, but these rooms were used only when Sir Robert came for shooting, which happened very rarely. The drawing-room upstairs was bare also, but yet had some lingerings of old-fashioned grace. From the small, deep-set, high windows there was a wide, unbroken view over the moor. The moor stretched everywhere, miles of it, grey as the low sky which hung over it, a canopy of clouds. The only relief was a bush of gorse here and there half in blossom, for the gorse is never wholly out of blossom, as everybody knows—and the dark gleam of the water in a cutting, black as the bog which it was meant to drain. The dreary moorland road which skirted the edge passed in front of the house, but was only visible from these windows at a corner, where it emerged for a moment from a group of blighted firs, before disappearing between the banks of heather and whin, which had been cut to give it passage. This was the only relief from the monotony of the moor.

It was at this house that Lily and her maid arrived after a journey which had not been so uncheerful as they anticipated. A journey by stage coach through a beautiful country can scarcely be dreary in the worst of circumstances. The arrivals, the changes, the villages and towns passed through, the contact with one's fellow-creatures which is inevitable, rub off more or less the most sullen discontent—and Lily was not sullen, while

Beenie was one of the most open-hearted of human creatures, ready to interest herself in everyone she met, and to talk to them and give her advice upon their circumstances. The pair met all sorts of people on their journey, and they made almost as many friendships; and thus partially forgot the penitential object of their own travels, and that they were being sent off to the ends of the earth.

It was only when "the gig" met them at the village where the coach stopped on its northern route that their destination began to oppress either the mistress or the maid. This was on the afternoon of a day which had been partially bright and partially wet, the best development of weather to be hoped for in the north. The village was a small collection of cottages, partly with tiled roofs, making a welcome gleam of colour, but subdued by a number of those respectable stone houses with blue tiles, which were and are the ideal of comfortable sobriety which, in defiance of all the necessities of the landscape, the Scotch middle class has unfortunately fixed upon. The church stood in the midst—a respectable, oblong barn, with a sort of long extinguisher in the shape of a steeple attached to it. On the outskirts the cottages became less comfortable and more picturesque, thatched, and covered with lichens. It was a well-to-do village. The "merchant," as he was called, *i.e.*, the keeper of the "general" shop, was a Lowland Scot, very contemptuous of "thae Highlanders," and there was a writer or solicitor in the place, and a doctor, besides the minister, who formed a little aristocracy. The English minister so called, that is, the Episcopalian, came occasionally—once in two or three Sundays—to officiate

in a smaller barn, without any extinguisher, which held itself a little apart in a corner, not to mingle with the common people who did not possess Apostolical Succession; though indeed in those days there was little controversy, the Episcopalians being generally of that ritual by birth, and unpolemical, making no pretensions to superiority over the native Kirk.

The gig that met the travellers at Kinloch-Rugas was a tall vehicle on two wheels, which had once been painted yellow, but which was scarcely trim enough to represent that type of respectability which a certain young Thomas Carlyle, pursuing the vague trade of a literary man in Edinburgh, had declared it to be. It was followed closely by a rough cart, in which Beenie and the boxes were packed away. They were not large boxes. One, called "the hair trunk," contained Lily's everyday dresses, but no provision for anything beyond the most ordinary needs, for there was no society nor any occasion for decorative garments on the moors. Beenie's box was smaller, as became a serving woman. These accessories were all in the fashion of their time, which was (like *Waverley*, yet ah, so unlike!) sixty years since or thereabout—in the age before railways, or at least before they had penetrated to the distant portions of the country. The driver of the gig was a middle-aged countryman, very decent in a suit of grey "plaidin"—what we now call tweed—with a head of sandy hair grizzled and considerably blown about by the wind across the moor. His face was ruddy and wrinkled, of the colour of a winter apple, in fine shades of red and brown, his shaggy eyebrows a little drawn together—by the "knitting of his brows under the glaring sun," and

the setting of his teeth against the breeze. He said, "Hey, Beenie!" as his salutation to the party before he doffed his bonnet to the young lady. Lily was not sure that it was quite respectful, but Dougal meant no disrespect. He was a little shy of her, being unfamiliar with her grown-up aspect and reverential of her young ladyhood—but he was at his ease with Robina, who was a native of the parish, the daughter of the late blacksmith, and "weel connectit" among the rustic folk. It would have been an ease to Dougal to have had the maid beside him instead of the mistress, and it was to Beenie he addressed his first remarks over his shoulder, from pure shyness and want of confidence in his own powers of entertaining a lady. "Ye'll have had a long journey," he said. "The coach she's aye late. She's like a thriftless lass, Beenie, my woman. She just dallies, dallies at the first, and is like to break her neck at the end."

"But she showed no desire to break her neck, I assure you," said Lily. "She was in no hurry. We have just taken it very easy up hill and down dale."

"Ay, ay!" he said, "we ken the ways o' them"—with a glance over his shoulder,—“are you sure you're weel happit up, Beenie, for there's a cauld wind crossing the moor?"

"And how is Katrin, Dougal?" Lily asked, fastening her cloak up to her throat.

"Oh, she's weel eneuch; you'll see little differ since ye left us last. We're a wee dried up with the peat-reek, and a wee blawn aboot by the wind. But ye'll mind that fine, Beenie woman, and get used to't like her and me."

Lily laid impatient fingers on the reins, pulling Dougal's hand, as if he had been the unsteady, rough pony he drove. "Speak to me," she said, "you rude person, and not to Beenie. Do you think I am nobody, or that I cannot understand?"

"Bless us all! No such a thought was in my head. Beenie, are ye sitting straight? for when the powny's first started whiles he lets out."

"Let me drive him," Lily cried. "I'll like it all the better if he lets out: and you can go behind if you like and talk to Beenie at your ease."

"Na, na," said Dougal, with a grin. "He kens wha's driving him. A bit light hand like yours would have very sma' effect upon Rory. Hey, laddies! get out of my powny's way!"

Rory carried out the prognostics of his driver by tossing his shaggy head in the air, and making a dash forward, scattering the children who had gathered about to stare at the new arrivals; though, before he got to the end of the village street, he had settled into his steady pace, which was quite uninfluenced by any skill in driving on Dougal's part, but was entirely the desire and meaning of that very characteristic member of society—himself. The day had settled into an afternoon serenity and unusual quietness of light. The mountains stood high in the even air, without any dramatic changes, Schehallion with his conical crest dominating the lesser hills, and wearing soberly his mantle of purple subdued by grey. The road lay, for a few miles, through broken ground, diversified with clumps of wood, wind-blown firs, and birches tossing their feathery branches in the air—crossing by a little bridge a brown and lively trout stream,

which went brawling through the village, but afterwards fell into deeper shadows, penetrating between close fir woods, before it reached the edge of the moor round which it ran its lonely way. Lily's spirits began to rise. The sense of novelty, the pleasant feeling of arrival, and of all the possibilities which relieve the unknown, rose in her breast. Something would surely happen; something would certainly be found to make the exile less heavy, and to bring back a little hope. The little river greeted her like an old friend. "Oh, I remember the Rugas," she cried. "What a cheery little water! Will they let me fish in it, Dougal? Look how it sparkles! I think it must remember me."

"It's just a natural objick," said Dougal. "It minds naebody; and what would you do—a bit lady thing—fishing troot? Hoots! a crookit pin in a burn would set ye better, a little Miss like you."

In those days there were no ladies who were salmon fishers. Such a thing would have seemed to Dougal an outrage upon every law.

"Don't be contemptuous," said Lily, with a laugh. "You'll find I am not at all a little Miss. Just give me the reins and let me wake Rory up. I mean to ride him about the moor."

"I'm doubting if you'll do that," said Dougal, with politeness but reserve.

"Why shouldn't I do it? Perhaps you think I don't know how to ride. Oh, you can trust Rory to me, or a better than Rory."

"There's few better in these parts," said Dougal, with some solemnity. "He's a beast that has a great deal of judgment. He kens well what's his duty in this life."

I'm no thinking you'll find it that easy to put him to a new kind of work. He has plenty of his ain work to do."

"We'll see about that," said Lily.

"Ah," replied Dougal, cautiously, "we'll just see about that. We must na come to any hasty judgment. Cheer up, lad! Yon's the half of the road."

"Is this only the half of the road?" said Lily with a shudder. They were coming out of the deep shade of the woods, and now before them, in its full width and silence, stretched the long levels of the moor. It was even now, in these days before the heather, a beautiful sight, with the mountains towering in the background, and the bushes of the ling, which later in the year would be glorious with blossoms, coming down, mingled with the feathery plumes of the seeding grass, to the very edge of the road: beautiful, wild, alive with sounds of insects, and that thrill of the air which we call silence—silence that could be heard. The wide space, the boundless sky, the freedom of the pure air, gave a certain exaltation to Lily's soul, but at the same time overwhelmed her with a sense of the loneliness and separation from all human interests which this great vacancy made. "Only half way," she repeated, with a gasp.

"It's a gey lang road, but it's a very good road, with few bad bits. An accustomed person need have nae fear by night or day. There was an ill-place, where ye cross the Rugas again, at the head of the Black Scaur; but it's been mended up just uncommon careful, and ye need have nae apprehension; besides that there's me that kens every step, and Rory that is maist as clever as me."

"But it's the end of the world," Lily said.

"No that, nor even the end of the parish, let alone the countryside," said Dougal. "It's just ignorance, a' that. It's the end o' naething but your journey, and a bonnie place when you're there; and a good dinner waiting for ye; and a grand soft bed, and your grandmither's ain cha'lmer, that was one of the grandest leddies in the North Country. Na, na, Missy, it's no the end of the world. If ye look far ahead, yonder by the east, as soon as we come to the turn of the road, ye'll maybe, if it's clear, see the tower. That's just a landmark over half the parish. Ye'll mind it, Beenie? It's lang or ye've seen so bonnie a sight."

"Ou, ay, I mind it," said Beenie, subdued. She had once thought with Dougal, that the tower of Dalrugas was a fine sight. But she had tasted the waters of civilisation, and the long level of the moor filled her breast, like that of her mistress, with dismay; though, indeed, it was with the eyes of Lily, rather than her own, that the kind woman saw this scene. For herself things would not be so bad. Dougal and Katrin in the kitchen would form a not uncongenial society for Robina. She did not anticipate for herself much difficulty in fitting in again to a familiar place; and she would always have her young mistress to pet and console, and to take care of. But Lily, where would Lily find anything to take her out of herself? Beenie realised, by force of sympathy, the weary gazing from the windows, the vacant landscape, through which no one ever would come, the loneliness indescribable of the great solitary moor: not one of her young companions to come lightly over the heather: neither a lad nor lass in whom the girl would

find a play-fellow. "Ay, I mind it," said Beenie, shaking her head, with big tears filling her eyes.

Lily, for her part, did not feel disposed to shed any tears—her mind was full of indignation and harsher thoughts. Who could have any right to banish her here beyond sight or meeting of her kind? And it was not less but more bitter to reflect that the domestic tyrant who had banished her was scarcely so much to blame as the lover who would risk nothing to save her. If he had but stood by her—held out his hand—what to Lily would have been poverty or humbleness? She would have been content with any bare lodging in the old town, high among the roofs. She would have worked her fingers to the bone—at least, Beenie would have done so, which was the same thing. That was a sacrifice she would have made willingly; but this that was demanded—who had any right to exact it? and for what was it to be exacted? For money, miserable money; the penny siller that could never buy happiness. Lily's eyes burned like coal. Her cheek scorched and blazed. Oh, how hard was fate, and how undeserved. For what had she done? Nothing, nothing to bring it upon herself.

It was another long half-hour before the gig turned the corner by the trees, where there was a momentary view of Dalrugas, and plunged again between the rising banks, where the road ran in a deep cutting, ascending the last slopes. "We'll be at the house in five minutes," Dougal said.

CHAPTER VI.

KATRIN stood under the doorway, looking out for the party: a spare, little, active woman, in the native dress of the place, which consisted of a dark woollen skirt and pink "shortgown," a garment not unlike the blouse of to-day, bound in by the band of her white apron round a sufficiently trim waist. She was of an age when any vanity of personal appearance, if ever sanctioned at all, is considered, by her grave race, to be entirely out of place; but yet was trim and neat by effect of nature, and wore the shortgown with a consciousness that it became her. A gleam of sunshine had come out, as the two vehicles approached in a little procession: and Katrin had put up her hand to her eyes to shade them from that faint gleam of sun, as she looked down the road. The less of sun there is the more particular people are in shielding themselves from it: which is a mystery, like so many other things in life, small as well as great. Katrin thought the dazzle was overwhelming as she stood looking out under the shadow of her curved hand. The doorway was rather small, and very dark behind her and the strong gleam of light concentrated in her pink shortgown, and made a brilliant spot of the white cap on her head. And to Katrin the two vehicles climbing the road were as a crowd, and the arrival an event of great excitement, making an era in life. She was interested, perhaps, like her husband, most particularly in Robina, who would be an acquisition to their own society, with all her experience of the grand life of the

South; but she bore a warm heart also to the little lady who had been at Dalrug as a child, and of whose beauty, and specially of whose accomplishments, there had been great reports from the servants in town to the servants on the moor. She hastened forward to place a stool on which Miss Lily could step down, and held out both hands to help, an offer which was made quite unnecessary by the sudden spring which the girl made, alighting "like a bird" by Katrin's side. "Eh, I didna mind how light a lassie is at your age," cried the house-keeper, startled by that quick descent. "And are ye very wearied? and have ye had an awfu' journey? and, eh, yonder's Beenie, just the same as ever! I'm as glad to see ye as if I had come into a fortune. Let me take your bit bag, my bonnie lady. Give the things to me."

"Yes, Beenie is just the same as ever—and you also, Katrin, and the moor," said Lily, with a look that embraced them all. She had subdued herself, with a natural instinct of that politeness which comes from the heart, not to show these humble people, on her first arrival, how little she liked her banishment. It was not their fault; they were eager to do their utmost for her, and welcomed her with a kindness which was as near love as any inferior sentiment could be—if it was, indeed, an inferior sentiment at all. But when she stood before the dark doorway, which seemed the end of all things, it was impossible not to betray a little of the loneliness she felt. "And the moor," she repeated. But Katrin heard the words in another sense.

"Ay, my bonnie lamb! the moor, that is the finest sight of a'. It's just beautiful when there's a fine sunset as we're going to have the night to welcome ye hame,

Come away ben, my dear; come away in to your ain auld house. Oh! but I'm thankful and satisfied to have ye here!"

"Not my house, Katrin. My uncle would not like to hear you say so."

"Hoot, away! Sir Robert's bark is waur than his bite. What would he have sent such orders for, to make everything sae comfortable, if there had been any doubt that it was your very ain house, and you his chosen heir? If Dougal were to let ye see the letter, a' full of loving kindness, and that he wanted a safe hame for his bit lassie while he was away. Oh, Miss Lily, he's an auld man to be marching forth again at the head of his troop to the wars."

"He is not going to the wars," said Lily. She could not but laugh at the droll supposition. Sir Robert, that lover of comfort and luxury, marching forth on any expedition, unless it were an expedition of pleasure! "There are no wars," she added. "We are at peace with all the world, so far as I can hear."

"Weel, I was wondering," said Katrin. "Dougal, he says, that reads the papers, that there's nae fighting neither in France nor what they ca'ed the Peninshula in our young days. But he says there are aye wars and rumour of wars in India, and such like places. So we thought it might, maybe, be that. Weel, I'm real content to hear that Sir Robert, that's an old man, is no driven to boot and saddle at his age."

"He is going, perhaps, to London," Lily said.

"Weel, weel, and that's no muckle better than a fight, from a' we hear—an awfu' place, full of a' the scum of the earth. Puir auld gentleman! It maun be

the king's business, or else something very important of his ain that takes him there. Anyway, he's that particular about you, my bonnie lady, as never was. You're to have a riding horse when ye please, and Dougal to follow you whenever he can spare the time; and there's a new piannyfortey come in from Perth, and a box full of books, and I canna tell you all what. And here am I keeping you at the door, havering all the time. You'll mind the old stair, and the broken step three from the top; or maybe you will like to come into the dining-room first and have a morsel to stay your stomach till the dinner's served; or maybe you would like a drink of milk; or maybe—Lord bless us! she's up the stair like a fire flaught and paying no attention; and, oh, Beenie, my woman, is this you?"

Bennie was more willing to be entertained than her mistress, whose sudden flight upstairs left Katrin stranded in the full tide of her eloquence. She was glad to be set down to a cup of tea and the nice scones, fresh from the girdle, with which the housekeeper had intended to tempt Lily. "I'll cover them up with the napkin to keep them warm, and when ye have ta'en your cup o' tea ye'll carry some up to her on a tray, or I'll do it mysel' with good will; but I mind ye are aye fondest of taking care of your bonnie Miss yoursel'."

"We'll gie her a wee moment to settle down," said Robina; "to take a good greet," was what she said to herself. She swallowed her tea, always with an ear intent on the sounds upstairs. She had seen by Lily's countenance that she was able for no more, and that a moment's interval was necessary; and there sat consuming her heart, yet perhaps comforted a little by

having the good scones to consume too. "Oh," she said, "ye get nothing like this in Edinburgh; ae scone's very different from another. I have not tasted the like of this for many a year."

"Ye see," said Katrin, with conscious success, "a drop of skim milk like what ye get in a town is very different from the haill cream of a milking; and I'm no a woman to spare pains ony mair than stuff. She's a bonnie, bonnie creature, your young lady, Beenie—a wee like her mother, as far as I mind, that was nothing very much in the way of blood, ye ken, but a bonnie young woman as ever stood. The auld leddie and Sir Robert were real mad against Mr. James for making such a poor match; but now there's nobody but her bairn to stand atween the house and its end. He'll be rael fond of her, Sir Robert; his bonnie wee heir!"

"Ay," said Beenie, "in his ain way."

"Weel, it wasna likely to be in a woman's way like yours or mine. The men they've aye their ain ways of looking at things. I'll warrant there's plenty of lads after her, a bonnie creature like that: and the name of Sir Robert's siller and a'."

"Oh, ay! she hasna wanted for lads," Beenie said.

"And what'll be the reason, Beenie, since the auld gentleman's no going to the wars, as Dougal and me thought—what'll be the reason, are ye thinkin', for the young leddy coming here? He said it was to be safe at hame while he was away."

"Maybe he would be right if that's what he says."

"Oh, Beenie, woman," cried Katrin, "you're secret, secret. Do you think we are no just as keen as you to please our young leddy and make her comfortable? or

as taken up to ken why she's been sent away, from a' her parties and pleasurings to bide here?"

"There's no many parties or pleasurings here for her," said Dougal, joining the two women in the low but airy kitchen, where the big fire was pleasant to look upon, and the brick floor very red, and the hearthstone very white. The door which stood always open afforded a glimpse of the universal background, the everywhere-extending moor, and the air came in keen, though the day was a day in June. Dougal pushed his bonnet to one side to scratch his grizzled head. In these regions, as indeed in many others, it is not necessary to take off one's headgear when one comes indoors.. "There's neither lad to run after her nor leddies to keep her company. If she's light-headed, or the like of that, there canna be a better place than oor moor."

"Light-headed!" said Robina in high scorn. "It just shows how little you ken. And where would I be, a discreet person, if my young leddy was light-headed? She's just as modest and as good as ever set foot on the heather. My bonnie wee woman! And as innocent as the babe new born."

Dougal pushed his cap to the other side of his head as if that might afford enlightenment. "Then a' I can say is that it's very queer"—and he added after an interval—"I never pretend to understand Sir Robert, he's an awfu' funny man."

"He might play off his fun better than upon Miss Lily," said his wife in anxious tones.

"And that minds me that I'm just havering here when I should be carrying up the tray," said Beenie. "Some of those cream scones—they're the nicest: and

that fine apple jelly is the best I've tasted for long. And now the wee bit teapot, and a good jug of your nice fresh milk that she will, maybe, like better than the tea."

"And my fine eggs—with a yolk like gold, and white that is just like curds and cream."

"No," said Beenie, waving them away, "that would just be too much: let me alone with the scones, and the milk, and the tea."

She went up the spiral stairs making a cheerful noise with her cups and her tray. A noise was pleasant in this quiet place. Beenie understood without knowing how, that the little clatter, the sound of some one coming, was essential to this new life; and though her arm was very steady by nature, she made everything ring with a little tinkle of cheerfulness and "company." The drawing-room of the house, which opened direct from the stairs with little more than a broadened and much worn step for a landing, was a large room occupying all the breadth of the tall gable, which was called the tower. It was not high, and the windows were small, set in deep recesses, with spare and dingy curtains. The carpet was a design un conjecturable, and of dark colour worn by use to a deep dinginess of mingled black and brown. The only cheerful thing in the room was a rug before the fireplace, made of strips of coloured cloth, which was Katrin's winter work to beguile the long evenings, and in which the instinct of self-preservation had woven many bits of red, relics or patterns of soldier's coats. The eye caught that one spot of colour instinctively. Beenie looked at it as she put down her tray, and Lily had already turned to it a dozen times,

as if there was something good to be got there. The walls were painted in panels of dirty green, and hung with a few pictures, which made the dinginess hideous—staring portraits executed by some country artist, or older relics still, faces which had sunk altogether into the gloom. Three of the windows looked out of the moor, one in a corner upon the yard, where Rory and his companion were stabled, and where there was an audible cackle of fowls, and sometimes Katrin's voice coming and going "as if a door were shut between you and the sound." Lily had been roaming about, as was evident by the cloak flung in one corner, the hat in another, the gloves on the table, the little bag upon the floor. She had gravitated, however, as imaginative creatures do, to the window, and sat there when Beenie entered as if she had been sitting there all her life, gazing out upon the monotonous blank of the landscape and already unconscious of what she saw.

"Well, Miss Lily," said Robina cheerfully, "here we are at last: and thankfu' I am to think that I can sit still the day, and get up in peace the morn without either coach or boat to make me jump. And here's your tea, my bonnie dear—and cream scones, Katrin's best, that I have not seen the like of since I left Kinloch-Rugas. Edinburgh's a grand place, and many a bonnie thing is there; and maybe we'll whiles wish ourselves back; but nothing like Katrin's scones have ye put within your lips for many a day. My dear bonnie bairn, come and sit down comfortable at this nice little table and get your tea."

"Tea!" said Lily; her lips were quivering, so that a laugh was the only escape—or else the other thing.

"You mind nothing," she cried, "so long as you have your tea."

"Weel, it makes up for many things, that's true," said Beenie, eager to adopt her young mistress's tone. "Bless me, Miss Lily, it's no the moment to take to that weary window and just stare across the moor when ye ken well there is nothing to be seen. It will be time enough when we're wearied waiting, or when there's any reasonable prospect—"

"What do you mean?" cried Lily, springing up from her seat. "Reasonable prospect—of what, I would like to know? and weary waiting—for whom? How dare you say such silly words to me? I am waiting for nobody," cried Lily, in her exasperation clapping her hands together, "and there is no reasonable prospect—if it were not to fall from the top of the tower, or sink into the peat-moss some lucky day."

"You're awfu' confident, Miss Lily," said the maid, "but I'm a great deal older than you are, and it would be a strange thing if I had not mair sense. I just tell you there's no saying; and if the Queen of Sheba was here she could utter no more."

"You would make a grand Queen of Sheba," said Lily, with eyes sparkling and cheeks burning, "and what is it your majesty tells me? for I cannot make head nor tail of it, for my part."

"I just tell you—there's no saying," Beenie repeated very deliberately, looking the young lady in the face.

Poor Lily! her face was glowing with sudden hope—the slight fingers trembled. What did the woman mean who knew everything? When we're wearied waiting—when there's no reasonable prospect. Oh what,

what did the woman mean? Had there been something said to her that could not be said to Lily? Were there feet already on the road, marching hither, hither, bringing love and bringing joy? "There's no saying." A woman like Robina would not say that without some reason. It was enigmatical—but what could it mean but something good; and what good could happen but one thing? Beenie, in fact, meant nothing but the vaguest of consolations—she had no comfort to give; but it was not in a woman's heart to shut out imagination and confess that hope was over. Who would venture to say that there was no hope, any day, any moment, in a young life, of something happening, which would make all right again? No oracle could have said less: and yet it meant everything. Lily, in the light of possibility that suddenly sprang up around her, illuminating the moor better than the pale sunshine, and making this bare and cold room into a habitable place, took heart to return to the happy ordinary of existence, and remembered that she was hungry and that Katrin's scones were very good, and the apple jelly beautiful to behold. It was a prosaic result, you may say, but yet it was a happy one, for she was very tired, and had great need of refreshment and support. She took her simple meal which was so pretty to look at—never an inconsiderable matter on a woman's table—the scones wrapt in their white napkin, the jug of creamy milk, the glass dish with its clear pink jelly. She ate and drank with much satisfaction, and then, with Beenie at her side, went 'wandering over the house to see if there was any furniture to be found more cheerful than the curtains and carpets in the drawing-room. The days of

“taste” had not arisen—no fans from Japan had yet been seen in England, far less upon the moors; but yet the natural instinct existed to attempt a little improvement in the stiff dulness of the place. Lily was soon running over all the house with a song on her lips—commoner in those days when music was not so carefully cultivated—and a skipping measure in the patter of her feet. “Hear till her,” said Dougal to Katrin, “our peace and quiet’s done.” “Hear till her indeed, ye auld crabbit body! It’s the blessing o’ the Lord come to the house,” said Katrin to Dougal. He pushed his cap now to one side, now to the other, with a scratch of impartial consultation what was to come of it—but also a secret pleasure that brought out a little moisture under his shaggy eyebrows. The old pair sat up a full half hour later, out of pure pleasure in the consciousness of the new inmate under that roof where they had so long abode in silence. And Lily rushed upstairs and downstairs, and thrilled the old floor with her hurried feet, but kept always saying over to herself those words which were the fountain of contentment—or rather expectation, which is better. There’s no saying—there’s no saying! If Beenie knew nothing in which there was a reasonable hope, how could she have suffered herself so to speak?

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Lily got up next morning it was to the cheerful sounds of the dairy, the clucking of fowls, the voices of the kitchen calling to each other, Katrin darting out a sentence as she came to the door, Dougal growling a bass order to the boy, the sound of whose hissing and movement over his stable work were as steady as if Rory were being groomed like a racer till his coat shone. It is not pleasant to be disturbed by Chanticleer and his handmaidens in the middle of one's morning sleep, nor to hear the swing of the stable pails, and the hoofs of the horses, and the shouts to each other of the outdoor servants. I should not like to have even one window of my bedchamber exposed to these noises. But Lily sprang up and ran to the window, cheered by this rustic Babel, and looked out with keen pleasure upon the rush of the fowls to Katrin's feet, as she stood with her apron filled with grain, flinging it out in handfuls, and upon the prospect through the stable of the boy hissing and rubbing down Rory, who clattered with his impatient hoofs and would not stand still to have his toilet made. Dougal was engaged in the byre in some more important operations with the cow, whose present hope and representative—a week-kneed, staggering calf—looked out from the door with that solemn stare of wondering imbecility, which is often so pathetic. Lily did not think of pathos. She was cheered beyond measure to look out on all this active life, instead of the silent moor.

The world was continuing to go round all the same: the creatures had to be fed: the new day had begun—notwithstanding that she was banished to the end of the world; and this was no end of the world after all, but just a corner of the country, where life kept going on all the same, whether a foolish little girl had been to a ball overnight, or had arrived in solitude and tears at the scene of her exile. A healthful nature has always some spring in it at the opening of a new day.

She went over the place under Katrin's guidance, when she had dressed and breakfasted, and was as ready to be amused and diverted as if she had found everything going her own way: which shows that Lily was no young lady heroine, but an honest girl following the impulses of nature. The little establishment at Dalrugas was not a farm. It had none of the fluctuations, none of the anxieties, which befall a humble agriculturist who has to make his living out of a few not very friendly acres, good year and bad year together. Dougal loved, indeed, to grumble when any harm came over the potatoes, or when his hay was spoilt, as it generally was, by the rain. He liked to pose as an unfortunate farmer, persecuted by the elements; but the steady wages which Sir Robert paid with the utmost regularity were as a rock at the back of this careful couple, whose little harvest was for the sustenance of their little household, and did not require to be sold to produce the ready money of which they stood so very little in need. Therefore, all was prosperous in the little place. The eggs, indeed, produced so plentifully, were not much profit in a place where everybody else produced eggs in their own barn-yards; but a sitting from Katrin's fowls

was much esteemed in the country-side, and brought her honour and sometimes a pleasant present in kind, which was to the advantage both of her comfort and self-esteem. But a calf was a thing which brought in a little money; and the milk formed a great part of the living of the house in various forms, and when there was any over did good to the poor folk who are always with us, on the banks of the Rugas, as in other places. Dougal would talk big by times about his losses—a farmer, however small, is nothing without them—but his loss sat very lightly on his shoulders, and his comfort was great and his little gains very secure.

The little steading which lurked behind Sir Robert's grey house, and was a quite unthought-of adjunct to it, did very well in all its small traffic and barter under such conditions. The mission of Dougal and his wife was to be there, always ready to receive the master when he chose to "come North," as they called it, with the shooting party, for whom Katrin always kept her best sheets well aired. But Sir Robert had no mind to trust himself in the chilly North: that was all very well when a man was strong and active and liked nothing so much as to tramp the moor all day, and keep his friends at heck and manger. But a man's friends get fewer as he gets old, and other kinds of pleasure attract him. It was perhaps a dozen years since he had visited his spare paternal house. And Dougal and Katrin had come to think the place was theirs, and the cocks and hens, and the cows and ponies the chief interest in it. But they were no niggards: they would have been glad to see Sir Robert himself had he come to pay them a visit: they were still more glad to see Lily, and to make

her feel herself the Princess, or it might be more correct to say the Suzerain, under whom they reigned. They did not expect her to interfere, which made her welcome all the more warm. As for Sir Robert, he might perhaps have interfered; but even in the face of that doubt, Dougal and Katrin would have acted as became them, and received him with a kindly welcome.

"Ye see this is where I keep the fowls," said Katrin. "It was a kind of gun-room, once; but this is a place where a shootin' gentleman seldom sets his fit, and there's no a gun fired but Dougal's auld carabeen. What's the use of keeping up thae empty places, gaun to rack and ruin, with grand names till them? The sitting hens are just awfu' comfortable in here; and as for Cockmaleerie, he mairches in and mairches out, like Mr. Smeaton, the schoolmaster, that has five daughters, besides his wife, and takes his walks at the head of them. A cock is wonderful like a man. If you just saw the way auld Smeaton turns his head and flings a word now and then at the chattering creatures after him! We've put the pig-stye out here. It's no just the place, perhaps, so near the house; but it's real convenient; and as the wind is maistly from the east, ye never get any smell to speak of. Besides, that's no the kind of smell that does harm. The black powny he's away to the moor for peat; but there's Rory, aye taking another rug at his provender. He's an auld farrant beast. He's just said to himself, as you or me might do: 'Here's a stranger come, and I am the carriage horse; and let's just make the most of it.'"

"He must be very conceited, if he thinks himself a carriage horse," said Lily, with a laugh.

"Deed, and he's the only ane; and no a bad substitute. As our auld minister said, the day yon young lad was preaching: 'No a bad substitute.' I trow no, seeing he's now the assistant and successor, and very well likit; and if it could only be settled between him and Miss Eelen, there could be naething more to be desired. But that's no the question. About Rory, Miss Lily—"

"I would much rather hear about Miss Helen. Who is Miss Helen? is it the minister's little girl that used to come out to Dalrugass to play with me?"

"She's a good ten years older than you, Miss Lily."

"I don't think so. I was how old? nine; and I am sure she was not grown up, nor anything like it. And so she can't make up her mind to take the assistant and successor? Tell me, Katrin, tell me! I want to hear all the story. It is something to find a story here."

"There are plenty of stories," said Katrin; "and I'll tell you every one of them; but about Miss Eelen. She's a very little thing. You at nine were bigger than she was—let us say—at sixteen. There maun be seven years atween you, and now she'll be six-and-twenty. No, it's no auld—and she's but a bairn to look at: and she will just be a fine friend for you, Miss Lily; for though they're plain folk, she has been real well brought up, and away at the school in Edinburgh, and plays the pianny, and a' that kind of thing. I have mair opinion mysel' of a good seam; but we canna expect everybody to have that sense."

"And why will she have nothing to say to the assistant and successor? and what is his name?"

"His name is Douglas, James Douglas, of a westland

family, and no that ill-looking, and well likit. Eh, but you're keen of a story, Miss Lily, like a' your kind. But I never said she would have naething to say to him. She is just great friends with him. They are aye plotting thegether for the poor folk, as if there was nothing needed but a minister and twa-three guid words to make heaven on earth. Oh, my bonnie lady! if it could be done as easy as that! There's that drunken body, Johnny Wright, that keeps the merchant's shop." Katrin was a well-educated woman in her way and never put *f* for *w*, which is the custom of her district; but she said *chop* for *shop*, an etymology which it is unnecessary to follow here. "But it's a good intention—a good intention. They are aye plotting how they are to mend their neighbours; and the strange thing is—But dear bless us! what are we to be hawering about other folk's weakness, when nae doubt we have plenty of our ain."

"I am not to be cheated out of my story, Katrin. Do you mean that the young minister is not a good man himself?"

"Bless us, no! that's not what I mean. He's just as pious a lad and as weel living—it's no that—it's no that. It's just one o' thae mysteries that you're far ower young to understand. She's been keen to mend other folk, poor lass! and that the minister should speak to them, and show them the error o' their ways! But the dreadful thing is that her poor bit heart is just bound up in a lad—a ne'er-do-weel, that is the worst of them all. Oh, dinna speak of it, Miss Lily, dinna speak of it! I'll tell you anither time; or, maybe, I'll no tell ye at all. Come in and see the kye. They're honest creatures.

There's nothing o' the deevil and his dreadful ways in them."

"I wouldna be ower sure of that," said Dougal, who came to meet them at the door of the byre, his cap hanging on to the side of his head, upon one grizzled lock, so many pushes and scratches had it received in the heat of his exertions. "There's Crummie, just as little open to raison as if she were a wumman. No a step will she budge, though its clean strae and soft lying that I'm offering till her. Gang ben, and try what ye can do. She's just furious. I canna tell what she thinks, bucking at me and butting at me, as if I was gaun to carry her off to the butcher, instead of just setting her bed in comfort for her trouble. None of the deil in them! What d'ye say to Rory? He's a deil a'thegether, from the crown of his head to his off leg, the little evil spirit! And what's that muckle cock ye're so proud o'? Just Satan incarnate, that's my opinion, stampin' out his ain progeny, when they're o' the same sect as himsel'. Dinna you trust to what she says, Miss Lily. There's nae place in this world where *he* is not gaun about like a roarin' lion seekin', as the Scripture saith, whom he may devour."

"Eh, man," said his wife, coming out a little red, yet triumphant, "but you're a poor hand with your doctrines and your opinions! A wheen soft words in poor Crummie's ear, and a clap upon her bonnie broad back, poor woman, and she's as quiet as a lamb. Ye've been tugging at her, and swearing at her, though I aye tell ye no. Fleeching is aye better than fechting, if ye would only believe me—whether it's a woman, or a bairn, or a poor timorsome coo."

"Ye're a' alike," said Dougal, with a grunt, returning to his work. "I'm thinking," he said, pausing to deliver his broadside, "that, saving your presence, Miss Lily, weemen are just what ye may call the head of the irrational creation. It's men that's a little lower than the angels; we're them that are made in the image of God. But when ye speak o' the whole creation that groaneth and travaileth, I'm thinking—"

"Ye'll just think at your work, and haud your ill tongue before the young lady," cried his wife, in high wrath. But she, too, added, as he swung away with a big laugh, "Onyway, by your ain comparison, we're at the head and you're at the tail. Come away, Miss Lily, and see the bonnie doos. There is nae ill-speaking among them. I'm no so sure," she added, however, when out of hearing of her husband, "I've heard yon muckle cushat, the one with the grand ruff about his neck, swearin' at his bonnie wifie, or else I'm sair mistaen. It's just in the nature o' the menkind. They like ye weel enough, but they maun aye be gibing at ye, and jeerin' at ye—but, bless me! a bit young thing like you, it's no to be expeckit ye could understand."

The pigeons were very tame, and alighted not only on Katrin's capacious shoulders, who "shoo'd" them off, but on Lily's, who liked the sentiment, and to find herself so familiarly accosted by creatures so highly elevated above mere cocks and hens—"the bonnie creatures," as Katrin said, who sidl'd and bridl'd about her with mincing steps and graceful movements. "The doocot" was an old grey tower, standing apart from the barn-yard, in a small field, the traditional appendage of every old Scotch house of any importance. To come upon Rory

afterwards, dragging after him the boy, by name Sandy, and not unlike, either in complexion or shape, to the superior animal whom he was supposed to be taking out for exercise—brought back, if not the former discussion on the prevalence of evil, at least a practical instance of “the deevil” that was in the pony, and was an additional amusement. Lily made instant trial of the feminine ministrations which had been so effective with the coo, whispering in Rory’s ear, and stroking his impatient nose, without, however, any marked effect.

“He’ll soon get used to ye,” Katrin said consolingly, “and then you’ll can ride him down to the town, and make your bit visits, and get anything that strikes your fancy at the shop. Oh, you’ll find there’s plenty to divert ye, my bonnie leddy, when once ye are settled down.”

Would it be so? Lily felt, in the courage of the morning, that it might be possible. She resolved to be good, as a child resolves: there should be no silly despair, no brooding, nor making the worst of things. She would interest herself in the beasts and the birds, in Rory, the pony, and Crummie, the cow. She would always have something to do. Her little school accomplishment of drawing, in which she had made some progress, according to the drawing master, she would take that up again. The kind of drawing Lily had learnt consisted in little more than copying other drawings: but that, when it had been carefully done, had been thought a great deal of at school; and then there was the fine fancy work which had been taught her—the wonderful things in Berlin wool, which were adapted to so many purposes, and occupied so large a share of feminine lives. Miss Mar-

tineau, that strong-minded politician and philosopher, amused her leisure with it, and why should not Lily? But Berlin patterns, and all the beautiful shades of the wool, could not, alas! be had on Dalrugas moor. Lily decided bravely that she would knit stockings at least, and that practice would soon overcome that difficulty about turning the heel, which had damped her early efforts. She would knit warm stockings for Sir Robert—warm and soft as he liked them—ribbed so as to cling close to his handsome old leg, and show its proportions, and so, perhaps, touch his heart. And then there would, no doubt, turn up, from time to time, something to do for the poor folk. Surely, surely there would be employment enough to “keep her heart.” Then she would go to Kinloch-Rugas and see “Miss Eelen,” Helen Blythe, the minister’s daughter, whom she remembered well, with the admiration of a little girl for one much older than herself. Here was something that would interest her and occupy her mind, and prevent her from thinking. And then there were the old books in the library, in which she feared there would be little amusement, but probably a great many good books that she had not read, and what a fine opportunity for her to improve her mind!

Her present circumstances were quite usual features in the novels before the age of Sir Walter: a residence in an old castle or other lonely house, where a persecuted heroine had the best of reading, and emerged quite an accomplished woman, was the commonest situation. She said to herself that there would be plenty to do: that she would not leave a moment without employment: that her life would be too busy and too full to leave any

time for gazing out at that window, watching the little bit of road, and looking, looking for someone who never came. Having drawn up this useful programme, and decided how she was to spend every day, Lily, poor Lily, all alone—even Beenie having gone downstairs for a long talk with Katrin—seated herself, quite unconsciously, at the window, and gazed, and gazed without intermission, at the little corner of the road that climbed the brae, and across the long level of the unbroken moor.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE days that succeeded were very much like this first day. In the morning Lily went out “among the beasts” and visited, with all the interest she could manage to excite in herself, the byre and the stable, the ponies and the cows. She persuaded herself into a certain amusement in contrasting the very different characters of Rory, the spoiled and superior, with that little sturdy performer of duty without vagary, who had not even a name to bless himself with, but was to all and sundry the black powny and no more. Poor little black powny, he supported Rory’s airs without a word; he gave in to the fact that he was the servant and his stable companion the gentleman. He went to the moor for peat, and to the howe for potatoes, and to the town for whatever was wanted, without so much as a toss of his shaggy head. Nothing tired the black powny, any more than anything ever tired the “buoy” who drove, and fed and groomed him, as much grooming as he

ever had. Sandy was the "buoy" just as his charge was the black powny. They went everywhere together, lived together, it was thought even slept together; and though the "buoy" in reality occupied the room above the stable, which was entered by a ladder—the loft, in common parlance—the two shaggy creatures were as one. All these particulars Lily learned, and tried to find a little fun, a little diversion in them. But it was a thin vein and soon exhausted, at least by her pre-occupied mind.

The post came seldom to this place at the end of the world. It never indeed came at all. When there were other errands to do in the village, the "buoy" and the black powny called at the post office to ask for letters—when they remembered: but very often Sandy did not mind, *i.e.*, recollect, to do this, and it did not matter much. Sir Robert, indeed, had made known his will that there were to be no letters, and correspondence was sluggish in those days. Lily had not bowed her spirit to the point of promising that she would not write to whomsoever she pleased, but she was too proud to be the first to do so, and, save a few girl epistles for which, poor child, she did not care, and which secured her only a succession of disappointments, nothing came to lighten her solitude. No, she would not write first, she would not tell him her address. He could soon find that out if he wanted to find it. Sir Robert Ramsay was not nobody, that there should be any trouble in finding out where his house was, however far off it might be. Poor Lily, when she said this to herself, did not really entertain a doubt that Ronald would manage to write to her. But he did not do so. The post came

in at intervals, the powny and the boy went to the town, and minded or did not mind to call for the letters: but what did it matter when no letters ever came? Ah, one from Sir Robert, hoping she found the air of the moor beneficial, one from a lighthearted schoolfellow, narrating all the dances there had been since Lily went away, and the last new fashion, and how like Alice Scott it was to be the first to appear in it. But no more. This foolish little epistle, at first dashed on the ground in her disappointment, Lily went over again, through every line, to see whether somewhere in a corner there did not lurk the name which she was sick with longing to see. It might so easily have been written without thought—"I danced with Ronald Lumsden and he was telling me," or, "Ronald Lumsden called and was asking about you." Such a crumb of refreshment as that Lily would have been glad of: but it never came.

Yet she struggled bravely to keep up her heart. One of those early days, after sundry attempts on the moor, where she gradually vanquished him, Lily rode Rory into Kinloch-Rugas with only a few controversies on the way. She was light and she was quiet, making no clattering at his heels as the gig did, and by degrees Rory habituated himself to the light burden and the moderate amount of control which she exercised over him. It amused him after a while to see the whisk of her habit, which proved to be no unknown drag or other mechanism, but really a harmless thing, not heavy at all—and as she gave him much of his own way, and lumps of sugar and no whip to speak of, he became very soon docile, as docile as his nature permitted, and gave her only as much trouble as amused Lily. They went all the way

to the town together, an incongruous but friendly pair, he pausing occasionally when a very tempting mouthful of emerald green grass appeared among the bunches of ling, she addressing him with amiable remonstrances as Dougal did, and eventually touching his point of honour or sense of shame so that he made a little burst of unaccustomed speed, and got over a good deal of ground in the stimulus thus applied. He was not like the trim and glossy steeds on which, with her long habit reaching half way to the ground and a careful groom behind, Lily had ridden out with Sir Robert, in the days of her grandeur, which already seemed so far off. But she was, perhaps, quite as comfortable in the tweed skirt in which she could spring unfettered from Rory's back and move about easily without yards of heavy cloth to carry. The long habit and the sleek steed and the groom turned out to perfection would have been out of place on the moor; but Rory, jogging along with his rough coat and his young mistress in homespun, were entirely appropriate to the landscape.

It required a good many efforts, however, before the final code of amity was established between them, the rule of bearing and forbearing, which encouraged Lily to so long a ride. When she slipped off his back at the Manse door, Rory tossed his shaggy head with an air of relief, and looked as if he might have set off home immediately to save himself further trouble; but he thought better of it after a moment and a few lumps of sugar, and was soon in the careful hands of the minister's man, who was an old and intimate friend, and on the frankest terms of remonstrance and advice. Lily was not by any means so familiar in the minister's house. She went

through the little ragged shrubbery where the big straggling lilac bushes were all bare and brown, and the berries of the rowan trees beginning to redden, but everything unkempt and ungracious, the stems burnt and the leaves blown away before their time by an unfriendly wind. The monthly rose upon the house made a good show with its delicate blossoms, looking far too fragile for such a place, yet triumphant in its weakness over more robust flowers; and a still more fragile-looking but tenacious and indestructible plant, the great white bindweed or wild convolvulus covered the little porch with its graceful trails of green and delicate flowers, which last so short a time, yet form so common a decoration of the humblest Highland cottages. Lily paused to look through the light lines of the climbing verdure as she knocked at the Manse door. It was so unlike anything that could be expected to bloom and flourish in the keen northern air. It gave her a sort of consoling sense that other things as unlike the sternness of the surroundings might be awaiting her, even here, at the end of the world.

And nothing could have been more like the monthly rose on the dark, grey wall of the Manse, than Helen Blythe, who came out of the homely parlour to greet Lily when she heard who the visitor was. "Miss Eelen" was Lily's senior by even more than had been supposed, but she did not show any sign of mature years. She was very light of figure and quick of movement, with a clear little morning face, extremely delicate in colour, mild brown eyes that looked full of dew and freshness, and soft brown hair. She came out eagerly, her "seam" in her hand, a mass of whiteness against her dark dress,

saying, "Miss Ramsay, Dalrugas?" with a quick interrogative note—and then Helen threw down her work and held out both her hands. "Oh, my bonnie little Lily," she cried in sweet, familiar tones. "And is it you? and is it really you?"

"I think I should have known you anywhere," said Lily; "you are not changed—not changed a bit; but I am not little Lily any longer. I am a great deal bigger than you."

"You always were, I think," said Helen, "though you were only a bairn and me a little, little woman, nearly a woman when you were here last. Come ben, my dear; come ben and see papa. He does not move about much or he would have come to welcome you. But wait a moment till I get my seam, and till I find my thimble—it's fallen off my finger in the fulness of my heart, for I could not bide to think about that when I saw it was you. And oh, stand still, my dear, or you'll tramp upon it!—and it's my silver thimble and not another nearer than Aberdeen."

"I've got one," cried Lily, "and you shall have it, Helen, for I fear, I fear, it is not so very much use to me."

"Oh, whisht, my dear. You must not tell me you don't like your seam. How would the house go on, and what would folk do without somebody to sew? For my part I could not live without my seam. Canny, canny, my bonnie woman, there it is! They are just dreadful things for running into corners—almost as bad as a ring. But there is a mischief about a ring that is not in a thimble," said Helen, rising, with her soft cheeks flushed, having rescued the errant thimble from the floor.

“And are you always at your seam?” said Lily, “just as you were when I was little, and you used to come to Dalrugas to play?”

“I don't think you were ever so little as me,” said Helen, with her rustic idiom and accent, her low voice and her sweet look, both as fresh as the air upon the moor. She did not reach much higher than Lily's shoulder. She had the most serene and smiling face, full, one would have said, of genuine ease of heart. Was this so? or was her mind full, as Katrin had said, of unhappy love and anxious thoughts? But it was impossible to believe so, looking at this soft countenance—the mouth which had not a line, and the eyes which had not a care.

Nowadays the humblest dwelling which boasts two rooms to sit in, possesses a dining-room and drawing-room; but at that period drawing-rooms were for grand houses only, and the parlour was the name of the family dwelling-place. It was very dingy, if truth must be told. The furniture was of heavy mahogany, with black hair-cloth. Though it was still high summer, there was a fire in the old-fashioned black grate, and close beside, in his black easy chair, was the minister—a heavy old man with a bad leg, who was no longer able to get about, and indeed did very little save criticise the actions of his assistant and successor—a man of new-fangled ways and ideas unlike his own. He had an old plaid over his shoulders, for he was chilly, and a good deal of snuff hanging about the lapels of his coat. His countenance was large and fresh coloured, and his hair white. In those days it was not the fashion to wear a beard.

"So that's Miss Lily from the town," he said. "Come away ben, come ben. Set a chair by the fire for the young lady, Eelen, for she'll be cold coming off the moor. It's always a cold bit, the moor. Many a cough I've caught there when I was more about the country-side than I am now. Old age and a meeserable body are sore hindrances to getting about. Ye know neither of them, my young friend, and I hope you'll never know—"

"Well, papa, it is to be hoped Lily will live to be old; for most folk desire it," said Helen—papaw, a harsh reporter would have considered her to say, but it was not so broad as a w; it was more like two a's—papaa—which she really said. She smiled very benignantlly upon the old gentleman, and the young creature whom he accosted. The name of gout was never mentioned—was, indeed, considered an unholy thing, the product of port wine and made dishes, and not to be laid to the account of a clergyman. But Mr. Blythe contemplated with emotion, supported on his footstool, the dimensions of a much swollen toe.

"Well," said he, "I hope she'll never live to have the rose in her foot, or any other ailment of the kind. And how's Sir Robert, my dear? Him and me are neighbourlike: there is not very much between us. Is he coming north this year to have a pop at the birds, or is he thinking, like me, I wonder, that a good easy chair by the fire is the best thing for an auld man? and a brace of grouse well cooked and laid upon a toast more admirable than any number of them on the moor?"

"I don't think he is coming for the shooting," said Lily, doubtful. Sir Robert was in many respects what was then called a dandy, and anything more unlike the

exquisite arrangements for his comfort, carried out by his valet, than the old clergyman's black cushion and footstool and smouldering fire could not be.

"You'll have had an illness yourself," said the minister, "though you do not look like it, I must say—does she now, Eelen, with a colour like that? But your uncle would have done better, my dear, to take you travelling, or some place where ye would have seen a little society and young persons like yourself, than to send you here. He'll maybe have forgotten what a quiet place it is, and no fit for the like of you. But I'll let him know, I'll let him know as soon as he comes up among us: which no doubt he will soon do now."

"Now, papa," said Helen, "you will just let Sir Robert alone, and no plot with him to carry Lily away from me: for I am counting very much upon her for company, and it will do her no harm to get the air of the moor for a while and forget all the dissipations of Edinburgh. You will have to tell me all about them, Lily, for I'm the country mouse that has never been away from home. Eh," said Helen, "I have no doubt everything is far grander when you're far off from it than when you're near. I daresay you were tired of the Edinburgh parties, and I would just give a great deal to see one of them. And most likely you thought the Tower would be delightful, while we are only thinking how dull it will be for you. That is aye the way; what we have we think little of, and what we have not we desire."

"I was not tired," said Lily, "except sometimes of the grand dinners that Uncle Robert is so fond of; and I cannot say that I expected the Tower to be delightful:

but you know I have no father of my own, and I must just do what I am told."

"My dear," said the old minister, "I see you have a fine judgment; for if you had a father of your own, like Eelen there, you would just turn him round your little finger; and I'm much surprised you don't do the same, a fine creature like you, with your uncle too."

"Whisht, papa," said Helen, "we'll have in the tea, which you know you're always fond of to get a cup when you can, and it'll be a refreshment to Lily after her ride. And in the meantime you can tell her some of your stories to make her laugh, for a laugh's a fine thing for a young creature whatsoever it's about—if it's only havers."

"Which my auld stories are, ye think?" said the minister. "Go away, go away, and mask your tea. Miss Lily and me will get on very well without you. I'll tell ye no stories. They are all very old, and the most of them are printed. If I were to entertain ye with my anecdotes of auld ministers and beadles and the like, ye would perhaps find them again in a book, and ye would say to yourself, 'Eh, there's the story Mr. Blythe told me, as if it was out of his own head'—and you would never believe in me more. But for all that it's no test being in a book; most of mine are in books, and yet they are mine, and it was me that put them together all the same. But I have remarked that our own concerns are more interesting to us than the best of stories, and I'm a kind of spiritual father to you, my dear. If I did not christen you, I christened your father. Tell me, now that Eelen's out of the way, what is it that's brought ye here? Is it something about a bonnie

lad, my bonnie young lass? for that's the commonest cause of banishment, and, as it cannot be carried out with the young men, it's the poor wee lassies that have the brunt to bear—"

"I never said," cried Lily, angry tears coming to her eyes, "that there was any reason or that it was for punishment. I just came here because — because — Uncle Robert wanted me to come," she added, in a little burst of indignation, yet dignity, "and nobody that I know has a right to say a word."

"Just so," said Mr. Blythe; "he wanted you, no doubt, to give an eye to Dougal and Katrin, who might be taking in lodgers or shooting the moors for their own profit for anything that he can tell. He's an auld farrant chield, Sir Robert. He would not say a word to you, but he would reckon that you would find out."

"Mr. Blythe," cried Lily, with fresh indignation, "if you think my uncle sent me here for a spy, to find out things that do not exist—"

"No, my dear, I don't, I don't," said the minister. "I am satisfied he has a mind above that, and you too. But he's not without a thread of suspicion in him; indeed, he's like most men of his years and experience, and believes in nobody. No, no, Dougal does not put the moor to profit, which might be a temptation to many men; but he has plenty of sport himself in a canny way, and there's a great deal of good game just wasted. You may tell Sir Robert that from his old friend. Just a great deal of good game wasted. He should come and bring a few nice lads to divert you, and shoot the moor himself."

"That's just one of papa's crazes," said Helen, re-

turning with her teapot in her hand, the tray, with all its jingling cups and saucers, having been put on the table in the meantime. "He thinks the gentlemen should come back from wherever they are, or whatever they may be doing, to shoot the moors. It would certainly be far more cheery for the countryside, but very likely Sir Robert cares nothing about the moor, and is just content with the few brace of grouse that Dougal sends him. I believe it's considered a luxury and something grand to put on the table in other places, but we have just too much of it here. Now, draw to the table and take your tea. The scones are just made, and I can recommend the shortbread, and you must be wanting something after your ride. I have told John to give the powny a feed, and you will feel all the better, the two of you, for a little rest and refreshment. Draw in to the table, my bonnie dear."

These were before the days of afternoon tea; but the institution existed more or less, though not in name, and "the tea" was administered before its proper time or repeated with a sense of guilt in many houses, where the long afternoon was the portion of the day which it was least easy to get through—when life was most languid, and occupation at a lull. Lily ate her shortbread with a girl's appetite, and took pleasure in her visit. When she mounted Rory again and set forth on her return, she asked herself with great wonder whether it was possible that there could be anything under that soft aspect of Helen Blythe—her serene countenance and delicate colour, which could in any way correspond with the trouble and commotion in her own young bosom? Helen had indeed her father to care for, she

was at home, and had, no doubt, friends; but was it possible that a thought of someone who was not there lay at the bottom of all?

Lily confessed to Robina when she got home that she had been much enlivened by her visit and that Helen was coming to see her, and that all was well; but when Beenie, much cheered, went downstairs to her tea, Lily unconsciously drew once more to that window, that watch-tower, from which nobody was ever visible. The moor lay in all the glory of the evening, already beginning to warm and glow with the heather, every bud of which awoke to brightness in the long rays of the setting sun. It was as if it came to life as the summer days wore towards autumn. The mountains stood round, blue and purple, in their unbroken veil of distance and visionary greatness, but the moor was becoming alive and full of colour, warming out of all bleakness and greyness into life and light. The corner of the road under the trees showed like a peep into a real world, not a dreary vacancy from which no one came. There was a cart slowly toiling its way up the slope, its homely sound as it came on, informing the silence of something moving, neighbourly, living. Lily smiled unconsciously as if it had been a friend. And when the cart had passed, there appeared a figure, alone, walking quickly, not with the slow wading, as if among the heather, of the rare, ordinary passer-by. Lily's interest quickened in spite of herself as she saw the wayfarer breasting the hill. Who could he be, she wondered. Some sportsman, come for the grouse—some gentleman, trained not only to moorland walking, but to quick progress over smoother roads. He skimmed along under

the fir trees at the corner, up the little visible ascent. Lily almost thought she could hear his steps sounding so lightly—like a half-forgotten music that she was glad, glad to hear again; but he disappeared soon under the rising bank as everything did, and she was once more alone in the world. The sun sank, the horizon turned grey, the moor became once more a wilderness in which no life or movement was.

No! what a jump her heart gave! it was no wilderness; here was the same figure again, stepping out on the moor. It had left the road, it was coming on with springs and leaps over the heather towards the house. Who was it? Who was it? And then he, he! held up his hand and beckoned, beckoned to Lily in the wilderness. Who was he? Nobody—a wandering traveller, a sportsman, a stranger. Her heart beat so wildly that the whole house seemed to shake with it. And there he stood among the heather, his hat off, waving it, and beckoning to her with his hand.

CHAPTER IX.

THE situation of Ronald Lumsden, for whom Lily felt herself to have sacrificed so much, and who showed, as she felt at the bottom of her heart, so little inclination to sacrifice anything for her, was, in reality, a difficult one. It would have been false to say that he did not love her, that her loss was no grief to him, or that he could make himself comfortable without her—which was what various persons thought and said, and he was not unaware of the fact. Neither was he unaware that

Lily herself had a half grudge, a whole consciousness that the way out of the difficulty was a simple one; and that he should have been ready to offer her a home, even though it would not be wealthy, and the protection of a husband's name and care against all or any uncles in the world. He knew that she was quite willing to share his poverty, that she had no objection to what is metaphorically called a garret—and which would really have resembled one more than is common in such cases—a little flat, high up under the roofs of an Edinburgh house—and to make it into a happy and smiling little home. And as a matter of fact that garret would not have been inappropriate, or have involved any social downfall either on his side or Lily's. Young Edinburgh advocates in those days set up their household gods in such lofty habitations without either shame or reluctance. Not so very long before the man whom we and all the world know as Lord Jeffrey set out in the world on that elevation, and made his garret the centre of a new kind of empire. There was nothing derogatory in it; invitations from the best houses in Edinburgh would have found their way there as freely as to George Square; and Lily's friends and his own friends would have filled the rooms as gaily as if the young pair had been lodged in a palace. He could not even say to himself that there would have been privations which she did not comprehend in such a life: for, little though they had, it would have been enough for their modest wants; and there was a prospect of more if he continued to succeed as he had begun to do. Many a young man in Edinburgh had married rashly on as little and had done very well indeed. All this Ronald knew as well as any-

one, and the truth of it rankled in his mind and made him unhappy. And yet on the other side there was, he felt, so much to be said! Sir Robert Ramsay's fortune was not a thing to be thrown away, and to compare the interest, weight, and importance of that with the suffering involved to young people who were sure of each other in merely waiting for a year or two, was absurd. According to all laws of experience and life it was absurd. Lily was very little over twenty; there was surely no hurry, no need to bring affairs to a climax—to insist on marrying when it would no doubt be better even for her to wait. This was what Lumsden said to himself. He would rather, as a matter of preference, marry at once, secure the girl he loved for his life-companion, and do the best he could for her. But when all things were considered, would it be sensible, would it be right, would it be fair?

This was how he conversed with himself during many a lonely walk, and the discussion would break out in the midst of very different thoughts, even on the pavement of the Parliament House as he paced up and down. Sir Robert's fortune—that was a tangible thing. It meant in the future—probably in the near future, for Sir Robert was a self-indulgent old man—a most excellent position in the world, safety from all pecuniary disasters, every comfort and luxury for Lily, who would then be a great lady in comparison with the struggling Edinburgh advocate. And the cost of this was nothing but a year's—a few years'—waiting, for a girl of twenty-two and a young man of twenty-eight. How preposterous indeed to discuss the question at all! If Lily had any feeling of wrong in that her lover did not carry her off,

did not in a moment arrange some makeshift of a poor life, the prelude to a continual, never-ending struggle—it could only be girlish folly on Lily's part: want of power to perceive the differences and the expediences. Could anything be more just than this reasoning? There is no one in their senses who would not agree in it. To wait a year or two at Lily's age, what more natural, more beneficial? He would have felt that he was taking advantage of her inexperience if he had urged her to marry him at such a cost. And waiting cost nothing—at least to him.

Not very long after Lily left Edinburgh, Lumsden had encountered Sir Robert one evening at one of the big dinner-parties which were the old gentleman's chief pleasure, and he had taken an opportunity to address the young fellow on the subject which could not be forgotten between them. He warned Lumsden that he would permit no nonsense, no clandestine correspondence, and that it was a thing which could not be done, as his faithful servants at Dalrugas kept him acquainted with everything that passed, and he would rather carry his niece away to England, or even abroad (that word of fear and mystery) than allow her to make a silly and unequal marriage. "You are sensible enough to understand the position," the old man had said. "From all I hear of you you are no hot-headed young fool. What you would gain yourself would be only a wife quite unused to shifts and stress of weather, and probably a mere burden upon you, with her waiting-woman serving her hand and foot, and her fine-lady ways—not the useful helpmate a struggling man requires."

"I should not be afraid of that," said Lumsden, with

a pale smile: for no lover, however feeble-hearted, likes to hear such an account of his love, and no youth, on the verge of successful life, can be anything but impatient to hear himself described as a struggling man. "I expect to make my way in my profession, and I have reason to expect so. And Lily—"

"Miss Ramsay, if you please. She is a fine lady to the tips of her fingers. She can neither dress, nor eat, nor move a step without Robina at her tail. She is not fitted, I tell you, for the wife of a struggling man."

"But suppose I tell you," cried Lumsden, with spirit, "that I shall be a struggling man only for a little while, and that she is in every way fitted to be *my* wife?"

"Dismiss it from your mind, sir; dismiss it from your mind," said Sir Robert. "What will the world say!—and what the world says is of great consequence to a man that has to struggle, even if it is only at the beginning. They will say that you've worked upon a girl's inexperience and beguiled her to poverty. They will say that she did not know what she was doing, but you did. They will say you were a fool for your own sake, and they will say you took advantage of her."

"All which things will be untrue," said Lumsden, hotly.

But then they were disturbed and no more was said. This conversation, though so brief, was enough to fill a man's mind with misgivings—at least, a reasonable man's—prone to think before and not after the event. Lumsden was not one that is carried away by impulse. The first effect was, that he did not write, as he had intended, to Lily. What was the use of writing if Sir Robert's faithful servants would intercept the letters? Why run

any risk, when there lay behind the greater danger of having her carried off to England or "abroad," where she might be lost and never heard of more. Ronald pondered all these things much, but his pondering was in different circumstances from Lily's. She had nothing to divert her mind; he had a great deal. Society had ended for her, but it was in full circulation—and he had his full share in everything—where he was. The pressure is very different in cases so unlike. The girl had nothing to break the monotony of hour after hour, and day after day. The young man had a full and busy life; so long in the Parliament House, so long in his chambers; a consultation; a hard piece of mental work to make out a case; a cheerful dinner in the evening with someone; a wavering circle of other men always more or less surrounding him. The difficulty was not having too much time to think, but how to have time enough; and the season of occupation and company and events, hurried on so that when he looked back upon a week it appeared to him like a day. And he had no way of knowing how it lingered with Lily. He wondered a little and felt it a grievance that she did not write to him, which would have been so very easy. There were no faithful servants on his side to intercept letters. She might have at least sent him a line to announce her safe arrival, and tell him how the land lay. He, on his side, could quite endure till the Vacation, when he had made up his mind to do something, to have news of her somehow. Even this determination made it more easy for him to defer writing, to make no attempt at communication; for why warn Sir Robert's servants and himself of what he intended to do, so that

they might concert means to baulk him? whereas it was so very doubtful whether anything he sent would reach Lily. Thus he reasoned with himself, with always the refrain that a year or two of waiting, at his own age and Lily's, could do no one any harm.

Yet Ronald was but mortal, though he was so wise. Sir Robert left Edinburgh, going to pay his round of visits before he went abroad, which he invariably did every autumn. There was no Monte Carlo in those days, and old gentlemen had not acquired the habit of sunning themselves on the Riviera; but on the other hand there was much more to attract them at the German Baths, which had many of the attractions now concentrated at Monte Carlo; and Florence possessed a Court and society, where life went on in that round of entertainment and congregation which is essential to old persons of the world. Sir Robert disappeared some time before the circles of the Parliament House broke up, and young Lumsden was thus freed from the disagreeable consciousness of being more or less under the personal observation of his enemy. And he loved Lily, though he was willing to wait, and to be temporarily separated from her in the interests of their future comfort and Sir Robert's fortune. So that, when he was released from his work and free to direct his movements for a time as he pleased, an attraction which he could not resist led him to the place of his lady's exile. All the good reasons which his ever-working mind brought forth against this were, I am happy to say, ineffectual. He said to himself that it was a foolish thing; that if reported to Sir Robert—and how could it fail to be reported to Sir Robert since his servants were so faithful,

and it would be impossible to keep them in the dark?—would only precipitate everything and lead to Lily's transfer to a safer hiding-place. He repeated to himself that to wait for a year or two, at twenty-two and at twenty-eight, was no real hardship; it was rather an advantage. But none of these wise considerations affected his mind as they ought to have done. He had a hunger and thirst upon him to see the girl he loved. He wanted to make sure that she was there; that there was a Lily in the world; that eventually she would be his and share his life. It was *plus fort que lui*.

He went home, however, as in duty bound, to the spare old house, on the edge of the Highlands, where he and all his brothers and sisters had been born and bred; where there was a little shooting—soon exhausted by reason of the many guns brought to bear upon it; and a good deal of company in a homely way—impromptu dances almost every night, as is the fashion in a large family, which attracts young people round it far and near. But in all this simple jollity Ronald only felt more the absence of his love, and the vacant place in the world which could only be filled by her; though what, perhaps, had as great an effect upon him as anything else was that his favourite sister—whom, next to her, perhaps he liked best in the world—knew about Lily, having been taken into his confidence before he had realised all the difficulties, and talked to him perpetually about her, disapproving of his inactivity and much compassionating the lonely girl. “Oh, if I were only near enough I would go and see her, and keep up her heart!” Janet Lumsden would cry, while her brother was fast getting into the condition of mind in which to

see her, to make sure of her existence, was a necessity. In this condition the old house at home, with all its simple gaieties and tumult, became intolerable to him. He could have kicked the brother who demanded his sympathy in his engagement to a young lady with a fortune—neither the young lady nor the fortune being worthy to be compared to Lily—though the family was delighted by such a piece of good luck for Rob. And it set all his nerves wrong to see the flirtations that went on around him, though they were frank and simple affairs, the inevitable preferences which one boy and girl among so many would naturally show for each other. All this seemed vulgar, common, intolerable, and in the worst taste to Ronald. It was not that he was really more refined than his brothers, but that his own affairs had gone (temporarily) so wrong, and his own chosen was so far out of the way. All the jolly, hearty family life at home jarred on him and upset his nerves—those artificial things which did not exist in Perthshire at that period, whatever they may do now.

At last, when he could not endure it any longer, he announced that he was going a-fishing up towards the North. He was not a great fisherman, and the brothers laughed at Ronald setting out with his rod; but he had the natural gift, common to all Scotsmen of good blood, of knowing most people throughout his native country, or at least one part of his native country, and being sure of a welcome in a hundred houses in which a son of Lumsden of Pontalloch was a known and recognisable person, though Lumsden of Pontalloch himself was by no means a rich or important man. This is an advantage which the *roturier* never acquires until at least he

has passed through three or four generations. Ronald Lumsden knew that he could never be at a loss; that if rejected in one city he could flee into another; and that if any impertinent questions were put to him by Sir Robert's own faithful servants, he could always say that he was going to stay at any of the known houses within twenty miles. This hospitality perhaps exists no longer, for many of these houses now—probably the greater part of them—are let to strangers and foreigners, to whom even the native names are strange, and the tradition of the country means nothing. But it was so still in those days.

He set out thus, more or less at his ease, and lingered a little on his way. Then he bethought himself, or so he said, of the Rugas, in which he had once fished as a boy, and which justified him in getting off the coach at the little inn—not much better than a village public-house—where a bare room and a hard bed were to be had, and a right to fish could be negotiated for. He had a day's fishing to give himself a countenance, inquiring into the history generally of the country, and which houses were occupied, and which lairds “up for the shooting.”

“Sir Robert here? Na, Sir Robert's not here. Bless us a', what would bring him here, an auld man like that, that just adores his creature comforts, and never touches a gun, good season or bad. No, he's no here, nor he hasna been here this dozen years. But I'll tell you wha's here, and that's a greater ferlie—his bonnie wee niece, Maister James's daughter, Miss Lily, as they call her. And it's no for the shooting, there's nae need to say, nor for the fishing either, poor bit thing. But

what it is for is more than I can tell ye. It's just a black burning shame—"

"Why is it a shame? Is the house haunted, or what's the matter?" Ronald said, averting his face.

"Haunted! that's a pack of havers. I'm not minding about haunted. But I tell ye what, sir, that bit lassie (and a bonnie bit lassie she is) is all her lane there, like a lily flower in the wilderness; for Lily she's called, and Lily she is—a bit willowy, slender creature, bowing her head like a flower on the stalk." The landlord, who was short, and red, and stout, leaned his own head to one side to simulate the young lady's attitude. "She's there and never sees a single soul, and it's mair than her life's worth, if ye take my opinion. If there was anybody to keep her company, or even a lot of sportsmen coming and going, it would be something; but there she is, all her lane."

"Miss Ramsay! I have met her in Edinburgh," Ronald said.

"Then, if I were you, I would just take my foot in my hand and gang ower the moor and pay her a visit. She will have a grand tocher, and she is a bonnie lass, and nowadays ye canna pick up an heiress at every roadside. It would be just a charity to give the poor thing a little diversion and make a fool o' yon old sneek-drawer to his very beard. Lord! but I wouldna waste a meenit if I were a young man."

Ronald laughed, but put on a virtuous mien. He said he had come for the fishing, not to pay visits, and to the fishing he would go. But when he had spent the morning on the river it occurred to him that he might take "a look at the moor"; and this was how it

was that he stole under the shadow of the bank when the last rays of the sunset were fading, and suddenly came out upon the heather under Dalrugas Tower.

CHAPTER X.

LILY could not believe her eyes: that it was Ronald who approached the house, taking high steps over the big bushes of ling, seeking none of the little paths that ran here and there across the moor, did not occur to her. She was afraid that it was some stranger or traveller, probably an Englishman, who, seeing a woman's head at a window, thought it an appropriate occasion for impertinently attempting to attract her attention. It was considered in those days that Englishmen, and wanderers unknown in the district, were disposed to be jocularly uncivil when they had a chance, and indeed the excellent Beenie, who had but few personal attractions, had rarely gone out alone in Edinburgh, as Lily had often been told, without being followed by some adventurous person eager to make her acquaintance. Lily's first thought was that here must be one of Beenie's many anonymous admirers, and after having watched breathlessly up to a certain point, she withdrew with a sense of offence, somewhat haughtily surprised that she, even at this height and distance, could be taken for Beenie, or that any such methods should be adopted to approach herself. But her heart had begun to beat, she knew not why, and after a few minutes' interval, she returned cautiously to the window. She did not

see anyone at first, and with a sigh of relief but disappointment said to herself that it was nobody, not even a lover of Beenie who might have furnished her with a laugh, but only some passer-by pursuing his indifferent way. Then she ventured to put out her head to see where the passing figure had gone: and lo, at the foot of the tower, immediately below the window, stood he whom she believed to be so far away. There was a mutual cry of "Ronald" and "Lily," and then he cried "hush, hush!" in a thrilling whisper and begged her to come out, "only for a moment, only for a word," he cried through the pale air of the twilight. "Has anything happened?" cried Lily bewildered. She had no habit of the clandestine. She forgot that there was any sentence against their meeting, and felt only that when he did not come to her, but called to her to go to him, there must be something wrong.

But presently the sense of the position came back to her. Dougal and Katrin had given no sign of consciousness that any restraint was to be exercised—they had not opposed any desire of hers, or attempted to prevent her from going out as she pleased; therefore the thought that they were now themselves at supper and fully occupied, though it came into her mind, did not affect her, nor did she feel it necessary to whisper back in return. But he beckoned so eagerly that Lily yielded to his urgency. She ran downstairs, catching up a plaid as she went, and in a moment was on the moor and by Ronald's side. "At last," he said, "at last!" when the first emotion of the meeting was over.

"Oh, it is me that should say at last," said the girl, "it is not you that have been alone for weeks and

weeks, banished from everything you know—not a kent face, not a kind word, and not a letter by the post.”

“I gave a promise I would not write. Indeed, I wanted to give them no handle against us, but to come the first moment I could without exciting suspicion.”

“You are very feared of exciting suspicion,” she said, shaking her head.

“Have I not cause? Your uncle upbraided me that I was taking advantage of your inexperience—persuading you to do things you would repent after. Can I do this, Lily? Can I lay myself open to such a reproach? Indeed, I do know the facts of things better than you.”

“I don't know what you call the facts of things,” she said. “Do you know the facts of this, the moor and nothing but the moor, and the two-three servants, and the beasts? Could you contrive to get your diversion out of the ways of a pony, and the cackle of the cocks and hens? Not but they are very diverting sometimes,” said Lily, her heart rising. She was impatient with him. She was even angry with him. He it was who was to blame for her banishment, and he had been long, long in doing anything to enliven it; but still he was here, and the world was changed. Her heart rose instinctively—even while she complained the things she complained of grew attractive in her eyes. The pony's humours brought smiles to her face, the moor grew fair, the diversion which she had almost resented when it was all she had, now appeared to her in a happy glow of amusement; though she was complaining in this same breath of the colourlessness of her life it now seemed to her colourless no more.

He drew her arm more closely through his. "And do you think I had more diversion?" he asked, "feeling every street a desert and my rooms more vacant than the moor? But that's over, my Lily, heaven be praised! I'm thought to be fishing, and fish I will, hereaway and thereaway, to give myself a countenance, but always within reach. And the moor will be paradise when you and I meet here every day."

"Oh, Ronald—if we can keep it up," Lily murmured in spite of herself.

"Why shouldn't we keep it up—as long, at least, as the Vacation lasts? After that, it is true, I'll have to go back to work; but it is a long time before that—and I will go back with a light heart to do my best, to make it possible to carry you off one day and laugh at Sir Robert, for that is what it must come to, Lily. You may have objections, but you must learn to get over them. If he stands out and will not give in to us, we must just take it in our own hands. It must come to that. I would not hurry or press a thing so displeasing if other means will do. And in the meantime we'll be very patient and try to get over your uncle by fair means. But if he is obstinate, dear, that's what it will have to come to. No need to hurry you, we're young enough. But you must prepare your mind for it, Lily—for that is what will have to come if he does not give way."

Lily clung to her lover's arm in a bewilderment of pleasure, which was yet confusion of thought, as if the world had suddenly turned upside down. This was her own sentiment, which Ronald had never shared; how in a moment had it become his, changing everything,

making the present delightful and the future all hope and light? Sir Robert's fortune had then begun to appear to him what it had always been to her, so secondary a matter! and Sir Robert himself only a relative worthy of consideration and deference, but not a tyrant obstructing all the developments of life. She could not say: "This is how I have felt all through," for indeed it had never been possible to her to say to him: "Take me, let us live poorly, but together," as she had always felt: or was it he who had felt this all through and not she at all? Lily was bewildered, her standing-ground seemed to have changed, the whole position was transformed. Surely it must have been she who held back, who wanted to delay and temporise, not the lover to whom the bolder way was more natural. She did not seem to feel the ground beneath her, all had so twisted and changed. "That is what it must come to; you must prepare your mind for it, Lily." Had that solid ground been cut from under her? was she walking upon air? Her head felt a little giddy and sick in the change of the world; yet what a change! All blessedness and happiness and consolation, with no trouble in it at all.

"I have thought so sometimes myself," she said in the great bewilderment of her mind.

"But in the meantime we must be patient a little," he said. "Of course I am going to take my Vacation here where we can be together. What kind of people are those servants? Do they send him word about everything and spy upon all your movements? Never mind, I'll find a way to baffle them—I am here for the fishing, you know, and after a little while I'll find a

lodging nearer, so that we may be the most of the time together whilst pretending to fish. If we keep up in this direction we will be out of reach of the windows, and you can set Beenie to keep watch and ward. For I suppose you still tell Beenie everything, and she is as faithful to you as Sir Robert's servants are to him?"

"I have no doubt they are faithful," said Lily, a little chilled by this speech, "but they are not spies at all. They never meddle with me. I am sure they never write to him about what I am doing; besides, Sir Robert is a gentleman, he would never spy upon a girl like me."

"We must not be too sure of that. He sent you here to be spied upon, at least to be kept out of everybody's sight. I would not trust him nor yet his servants. And I am nearer to you than Sir Robert, Lily. I am your husband—that is going to be. It might be wrong for you to meet any other man, which you would never think of doing—but there's nothing wrong in meeting me."

"I never thought so," said Lily, subdued. "I am very very glad to have you here. It will make everything different. Only there is no need to be alarmed about Dougal and Katrin. I think they are fonder of me than of Uncle Robert. They are not hard upon me, they are sorry for me. But never mind about that; will you really, really give up your Vacation and your shooting, and all your pleasure at home, to come here and bide with me?"

"That and a great deal more," said Ronald, fervently. He felt at that moment that he could give everything up for Lily. He was very much pleased, elevated,

gratified by what he himself had said. He had taken the burden of the matter on his own shoulders, as it was fit that a man should do. He had felt when they last parted that in some way—he could not exactly say what—he had not come up to what was expected of him. He had not reached the height of Lily's ideal. But now everything was different. He had spoken out, he had assumed a virtue of which he had not been quite sure whether he had it or not; but now he was sure. He would not forsake her—he would never ask her to wait unduly or to suffer for him now. To be sure they would have to wait—they were young enough, there was no harm in that—but not longer than was fit, not to make her suffer. He drew her arm within his, leading her along through the intricacies of the fine turf that formed a green network of softness amid the heather. It was not for her to stumble among the big bushes of ling, or spring over the tufts. His business was to guard her from all that; to lead her by the grassy paths, where her soft footsteps should find no obstacle. There is a moment in a young man's life when he thinks of this mission of his with a certain enthusiasm. Whatever else he might do, this was certainly his, to keep a woman's foot from stumbling, to smooth the way for her, to find out the easiest road. The more he did it, the more he felt sure that it was his to do, and should be, through all the following years.

Lily was a long time out of doors that night. Robina came upstairs from the lengthened supper, which was one of the pleasantest moments of the day downstairs, when all the work was done, and all were free to talk and linger without any thought of the beasts or the

poultry. The cows and the ponies were all suppered and put to bed. All the chickens, mothers and children, had their heads under their wings. The watchfullest of cocks was buried in sleep, the dogs were quiet on the hearthstone. Then was the time for those "cracks," which the little party loved. Beenie told her thrice-told tale, of the wonders of Sir Robert's kitchen, and the goings on of Edinburgh servants, while Katrin gave forth the chronicles of the country-side, and Dougal, not to be outdone, poured forth rival recollections of things which he had seen when the Laird's man, following his master afar, and of the tragedy of Mr. James, Lily's father, who had died far from home. They would sometimes talk all together without observing it, carrying on each his various strain. And as there was nobody to interrupt, supper-time was long and full of varied interest. Sandy, the boy, sat at the foot of the table with round and wondering eyes. But though he laid up many an image for future admiration, his interest flagged after a while, and an oft-repeated access of sleep made him the safest of listeners. "G'y way to your bed, laddie," Katrin would say, not without kindness. "Lord bless us!" cried Dougal, giving his kick of dismissal under the table. "D'ye no hear what the mistress tells ye?" But this was the only thing that disturbed the little party. And Beenie usually came upstairs to find Lily with her pale face, she who had no cronies, nor anyone with whom to forget herself in talk, "wearying" for her sole attendant.

But on this night Beenie found no one there when she came upstairs, running, and a little guilty to think of the solitude of her little mistress. For a moment

Beenie had a great throb of terror in her breast—the window was open, a faint and misty moon was shining forlorn over the moor, there were no candles lighted, nor sign of any living thing. Beenie coming in with her light was like a searcher for some dreadful thing, entering a place of mystery to find she knew not what. She held up her candle and cast a wild glance round the room, as if Lily might have been lying in a heap in some corner—then, with a suppressed scream, rushed into the adjacent bed-room, where the door stood open and all was emptiness. Not there, not there! The distracted woman flew to the open window with a wild apprehension that Lily, in her despair, might have thrown herself over. “Oh, Miss Lily, Miss Lily!” she cried, setting down her light and wringing her hands. Every horrible thing that could have happened rushed through Beenie’s mind. “And what will they say to me, that let her bide her lane and break her heart?” she moaned within herself. And so strong was the certainty in her mind that something dreadful had happened, that when a sound struck her ear and she turned sharp round to see the little mistress—whom she had, in imagination, seen laid out white and still upon her last bed—standing all radiant in life and happiness behind her, the scream which burst forth from Beenie’s lips was wilder than ever. Was it Lily who stood there, smiling and shining, her eyes full of the dew of night, and every line of her countenance beaming? or was it rather Lily’s glorified ghost, the spirit that had overcome all troubles of the flesh? It was the mischievous look in Lily’s eyes that convinced her faithful servant that this last hypothesis could not be the explanation. For mischief surely will not shine in glorified

eyes, or the blessed amuse themselves with the consternation of mortals. And Beenie's soul, so suddenly relieved of its terrors, burst out in an "Oh, Miss Lily!" the perennial remonstrance with which the elder woman had all her life protested against, yet condoned and permitted, the wayward humours of the girl.

"Well, Beenie! and how long do you think you will take to your supper another time?" Lily said.

"Oh, Miss Lily, and where have you been? I've had a fright that will make me need no more suppers as long as I live. Supper, did ye say? Me that thought that you were out of the window, lying cauld and stark at the foot of the Tower. Oh, my bonnie dear, my heart's beating like a muckle drum. Where have ye been?"

"I have been on the moor," said Lily, dreamily. "I've had a fine walk, half the way to the town, while you have been taken up with your bannocks and your cheese, and your cracks. I had a great mind to come round to the window and put something white over my head and give you a good fright, sitting there telling stories and thinking nothing of me."

"Eh, I wasna telling stories, no me!"

Why Beenie made this asseveration I cannot tell; for she did nothing but tell stories all the time that Dougal, Katrin and she were together—but it was natural to deny instinctively whatever accusation of neglect was brought against her. "And eh," she cried with natural art, turning the tables, "what a time of night to be out on that weary moor, a young lady like you. Your feet will be wet with the dew, and no a thing upon your shoulders to keep you from the cold. Eh, Miss Lily,

Miss Lily!" cried Robina, with all the fictitious indignation of a counter-accusation, "them that has to look after you and keep you out of mischief has hard ado."

"Perhaps you will get me a little supper, now that you have had plenty for yourself," said Lily, keeping up the advantage on her side. But she was another Lily from that pale flower which had looked so sadly over the moor before Robina went downstairs to her prolonged meal—a radiant creature with joy in every movement. What could it be that had happened to Lily while her faithful woman was downstairs?

CHAPTER XI.

LILY kept the secret to herself as long as it was in mortal power to do so. She sent Beenie off to bed, entirely mystified and unable to explain to herself the transformation which had taken place, while she herself lay down under the canopies of the "best bed" and watched the misty moonlight on the moor, and pictured to herself that Ronald would be only now arriving, after his long walk, at his homely lodging. But what did it matter to him to be late, to walk so far, to traverse, mile after mile in the dark, that lonesome road? He was a man, and it was right and fit for him. If he had been walking half the night, it would have been just what the rural lads do—proud of their sweethearts, for whom they sacrifice half their rest.

"I'll take my plaid, and out I'll steal,
And o'er the hills to Nannie O."

That was the sentiment for the man, and Lily felt her heart swell with the pride of it and the satisfaction. She had thought—had she really thought it?—that he was too careful, too prudent, more concerned about her fortune than her happiness—but how false that had all been? or how different he was now! “To carry you off some day and laugh at Sir Robert—for that is what it must come to, Lily.” Ah, she had always known that this was what it must come to: but he had not seen it, or at least she had thought he did not see it in the Edinburgh days. He had learnt it, however, since then, or else—which was most likely—it had always been in him, only mistaken by her or undeveloped; for it takes some time, she said to herself, before a man like Ronald, full of faith in his fellow-creatures, could believe in a tyranny like Sir Robert's, or think that it was anything but momentary. To think that the heartless old man should send a girl here, and then go away and probably forget all about her, leaving her to pine in the wilderness—that was a thing that never would have entered into Ronald's young and wholesome mind. But now he saw it all, and that passiveness which had chilled and disappointed Lily was gone. That was what it must come to. Ah, yes, it was this it must come to—independence, no waiting on an old man's caprices, no dreadful calculations about a fortune which was not theirs, which Lily did not grudge Sir Robert, which she was willing, contemptuously, that he should do what he pleased with, which she would never buy at the cost of the happiness of her young life. And now Ronald thought so too. The little flat high up under the tiles of a tall old Edinburgh house began to appear again,

looming in the air over the wild moor. What a home it would be, what a nest of love and happiness! Ronald never should repent, oh, never, never should he repent that he had chosen Lily's love rather than Sir Robert's fortune. How happy they would be looking out over all the lights and shadows with the great town at their feet, and all their friends around. Lily fell asleep in this beatitude of thought, and in the same awakened, wondering at herself for one moment why she should feel so happy, and then remembering with a rush of delightful retrospection. Was it possible that all the world had thus changed in a moment, that the clouds had all fled away, that these moors were no longer the wilderness, but a little outlying land of paradise where happiness was, and everything that was good was yet to be?

Beenie found her young mistress radiant in the morning as she had left her radiant when she went to bed. The girl's young countenance could not contain her smiles—they seemed to ripple over, to mingle with the light, to make sunshine where there was none. What could have happened to her in that social hour when Robina was at supper with her friends—usually one of the dullest of the twenty-four to lonely Lily? Whom could she have seen, what could she have heard to light those lamps of happiness in her eyes? But Robina could not divine what it was, and Lily laughed and flouted, and reproached her with smiles always running over. "You were so busy with your supper, you never looked what might be happening to me. You and Katrin and Dougal were so full of your cracks, you had no eyes for a poor lassie. I might have been lost upon the moor and you would never have found it out. But I was not

lost, you see, only wonderfully diverted and spent a happy evening, and you never knew."

"Miss Lily," said Beenie, with tears, "never more, if I should starve, will I go down to my supper again!"

"You will just go down to your supper to-night and every night, and have your cracks with Dougal and Katrin, and be as happy as you can; for I am happy too. I am lonely no more. I am just the Lily I used to be before trouble came—oh, better! for it's finer to be happy again after trouble than when you are just innocent and never have learnt what it is."

"The Lord bless us all!" cried Beenie solemnly, "the bairn speaks as if she had gone, like Eve, into the thickest of the gairden and eaten of the tree—"

"So I have," said Lily. "I once was just happy like the bairn you call me, and then I was miserable. And now I know the difference: for I'm happy again, and so I will always be."

"Oh, Miss Lily," said Beenie, "to say you will always be is just flying in the face of Providence—for there is nobody in this world that is always happy. We would be mair than mortal if we could be sure of that."

"But I am sure of it," said Lily, "for what made me miserable was just misjudging a person. I thought I understood, and I didn't understand. And now I do; and if I were to live to a hundred I would never make that mistake again. And it lies at the bottom of everything. I may be ill, I may be poor, I may have other troubles; but I can never, never," said Lily, placing piously her hands together, "have that unhappiness which is the one that gives bitterness to all the rest—again."

"My bonnie lady! I wish I knew what you were meaning," Beenie said.

Lily kept her hands clasped and her head raised a little, as if she were saying a prayer. And then she turned with a graver countenance to her wondering maid. "Do you think," she said, "that Dougal or Katrin—but I don't think Katrin—write to Uncle Robert and tell him everything I do?"

"Dougal or Katrin—write to Sir Robert? But what would they do that for?" said Beenie, with wide open eyes.

"Well, I don't know—yes, I do know. I know what has been said, but I don't believe it. They say that Sir Robert's servants write everything to him and tell him all I do."

"You do nothing, Miss Lily. What should they write? What do they ken? They ken nothing. Miss Lily, Sir Robert, he's a gentleman. Do you think he would set a watch on a bit young creature like you? He may be a hard man, and no considerate, but he is not a man like that."

"That's what I said," cried Lily—"but tell me one thing more. Do they know—did he tell them why—what for he sent me here?"

A blush and a cloud came over her sensitive face—and then a smile broke forth like the sunshine, and chased the momentary trouble away.

"Not a word, Miss Lily, not a word. Was he likely to expose himsel' and you, that are his nearest kin? No such thing. Many, many a wonder they have taken, and many a time they have tried to get it out of me; but I say it was just because of having no fit home for

a young lady, and him aye going away to take his waters, and to play himself at divers places that were not fit for the like of you. They dinna just believe me, but they just give each other a bit look and never say a word. And it's my opinion, Miss Lily, that they're just far fonder of you, Mr. James's daughter, then they are of Sir Robert; for Dougal was Mr. James's ain man; and to betray you to your uncle, even if there was anything to tell—which there is not, and I'm hoping never will be—is what they would not do. You said yourself you did not believe that Katrin would ever tell upon you; and I'm just as sure of Dougal, that is very fond of you, though he mayna show it. And then there's the grand security of a', Miss Lily, that there is nothing to tell."

"To be sure, that is, as you say, the grand security of all." Then Lily's face burst into smiles, and she flung discretion to the winds. "Beenie," she said, "you would never guess. I was very lonely at the window last night, wondering and wondering if I would just bide there all my life, and never see anybody coming over the moor: when, in a moment, I saw somebody! He was standing among the heather at the foot of the tower—"

"Miss Lily!"

"Just so," said the girl nodding her head in the delight of her heart. "It was just—him. When everything was at the darkest, and my heart was broken—Oh, Beenie! and it's quite different from what I thought. I thought he was more for saving Uncle Robert's fortune than for making me happy. I was just a fool for my pains. 'If he stands out we must just take it in our

own hands—it must come to that, you must just prepare your mind for it, Lily.’ That was what he said—and me misjudging and making myself miserable all the time. That is why I say I will never be miserable again, for I will misjudge Ronald no more.”

“Eh, Miss Lily!” Beenie said again. Her mind was in a confusion even greater than that of her young mistress; and she did not know what to say. If Lily had misjudged him, so had she—and worse, and worse, she said to herself! Beenie had not been made miserable, however, by the mistake as Lily had been, and she was not uplifted by the discovery—if it was a discovery—a cold doubt still hovered about her heart.

“I will tell you the truth. I will not hide anything from you,” said Lily. “He is at Kinloch-Rugas, he is staying in the very town itself. He has come here for the fishing. He’ll maybe not catch many fish, but we’ll both be happy, which is of more importance. Be as long as you like at your supper, Beenie, for then I will slip out and take my walk upon the moor, and Dougal and Katrin need never know anything, except that I am as they think already, a silly lassie keeping daft-like hours. If they write that to Uncle Robert what will it matter? To go out on the moor at the sunset is not silly, it is the right thing to do. And the weather is just like heaven, you know it is, one day rising after another, and never a cloud.”

“’Deed there are plenty of clouds,” said Beenie, “and soon we’ll have rain, and you cannot wander upon the moor then, not if he were the finest man in all the world.”

“We’ll wait till that time comes, and then we’ll think

what's best to do; but at present it is just the loveliest weather that ever was seen. Look at that sky," said Lily, pointing to the vault of heavenly blue which, indeed, was not cloudless, but better, flecked with beatific specks of white like the wings of angels. And then the girl sprang out of bed and threw herself into Robina's arms. "Oh, I've been faithless, faithless!" she cried. "I've thought nothing but harm an' ill. And I was mistaken, mistaken all the time! I could hide my face in the dust for shame, and then I could lift it up to the skies for joy. For there's nothing matters in this world so long as those you care for are good and true, and care for you. Nothing, nothing, whether it's wealth or poverty, whether it's parting or meeting. I thought he was thinking more of the siller than of true love. The more shame to me in my ignorance, the silly, silly thing I was. And all the time it was just the contrary, and true love was what he was thinking of, though it was only for an unworthy creature like me."

"I wouldna be so humble as that, my bonnie dear. Ye are nane unworthy, you're one that any person might be proud of to have for their ain. I'm saying nothing against Mr. Ronald, wha is a fine young man and just suits ye very well if everything was according. Weel, weel, you need not take off my head. Ye can say what ye like, but he would just be very suitable if he had a little more siller or a little more heart. Oh, I am not misdoubting his heart in that kind of a way. He's fond enough of you, I make no doubt of that. It's courage is what he wants, and the heart to take things into his own hands."

"Beenie," said the young mistress with dignity, "when

the like of you takes a stupid fit, there is nothing like your stupidity. Oh! it's worse than that—it is a determination not to understand, that takes the patience out of one. But I will not argue; I might have held my tongue and kept it all to myself, but I would not, for I've got a bad habit of telling you everything. Ah! it's a very bad habit, when you set yourself like a stone wall, and refuse to understand. Go away now, you dull woman, and leave me alone; and if you like to betray me and him to those folk in the kitchen you will just have to do it, for I cannot stop you; but it will be the death of me."

"*I* betray you!" said Beenie with such a tone of injured feeling as all Lily's caresses, suddenly bestowed in a flood, could not calm; but peace was made after a while, and Robina went forth to the world as represented by Katrin and Dougal with an increase of dignity and self-importance which these simple people could not understand. "Bless me, you will have been hearing some grand news or other," said Katrin.

"Me! how could I hear any news, good or bad, and me the same as in prison?" said Beenie; upon which both her companions burst into derisive laughter.

"An easy prison," said Katrin, "where you can come and gang at your pleasure and nobody to say, where are ye going?"

"You're on your parole, Beenie," said Dougal, "like one of the officers in the time of the war."

"That is just it," said Robina, "you never said a truer word. I'm just on my parole. I can go where I please but no go away. And I can do what I please,

but no what I want to do. That's harder than stone walls and iron bars."

"But what can ye be wanting to do sae out of the ordinary?" said Katrin. "Me, I thought we were such good friends just living very peaceable; and you content, Beenie, more or less—as weel as a middle-aged woman with nothing happening to her is like to be."

"I wasna consulting you about my age or what I expected," Beenie replied with quick indignation. It was a taunt that made the tears steal to her eyes. If Katrin thought it was such a great thing to be married and that she, Robina, had not had her chance like another! But she drew herself up and added grandly, "It is my young lady that is in prison, poor thing, shut out from all her own kind. And how do I ken that you two are not just two goalers over her, keeping the poor thing fast that she should never make a step, nor see a face, but what Sir Robert would have to know."

The two guardians of Dalrugan consulted each other with a glance. "Oh, is that hit?" said Katrin. It is seldom, very seldom, that a Scotch speaker makes any havoc with the letter *h*, but there is an occasional exception to this rule for the sake of emphasis, "*hit*" is a stronger expression than "Is that it." It isolates the pronoun and gives it force. Dougal, for his part, pushed his cap off his head till it hung on by one hair. It had been Robina's object to keep them in the dark; but her attempt was not successful. It diverted rather a stream of light upon a point which they had not yet taken into consideration at all. Many had been the wonderings at first over Lily's arrival, and Sir Robert's reason for sending her here, but no guidance had been

afforded to the curious couple and their speculations had died a natural death. But Robina's unguarded speech woke again all the echoes. "It will just be a lad, after a'," Katrin said to her spouse, when Robina, perceiving her mistake, retired. "I wouldna say but what it was," answered Dougal. "And eh, man," said his wife, "you and me that just stable our beasts real peaceable together, would not be the ones to make any outcry if it was a bonnie lad and one that was well meaning." "If the lad's bonnie or not is naething to you or me," said the husband.

"I'm no speaking of features, you coof, and that ye ken weel; but one that means weel and would take the poor bit motherless lassie to a hame of her ain; eh, Dougal man!" said Katrin with the moisture in her eyes. "How do we ken," said Dougal, "if there is a lad—which is no way proved, but weemen's thoughts are aye upon that kind of thing—that he is no just after Sir Robert's fortune, and thinking very little of the bonnie lass herself?" "Eh, but men are ill-thinking creatures," said Katrin, "ye ken by yourselves and mind all the worldly meanings ye had when a poor lass was thinking but of love and kindness. And what for should the gentleman be thinking of Sir Robert's fortune? He has, maybe, as good a one of his ain." "No likely," said Dougal, shaking his head. But he added, "I'll no play false to Maister James's daughter, whatever—and you'll no let me hear any clashes out of your head," he said, with magisterial action, striding away. "When it was me that was standing up for her a' the time!" Katrin cried with an indignation that was not without justice,

CHAPTER XII.

NEXT night the supper was much prolonged in the kitchen at Dalrugas. The three *convives*—for Sandy tumbled off to sleep and was hustled off to bed at an early hour—told stories against each other with devotion; Katrin adding notes and elucidations to every anecdote slowly worked out by her husband, and meeting every wonder of Beenie's by a more extraordinary tale. But while they thus occupied themselves with a strong intention and meaning that Lily's freedom should be complete, the thrill of consciousness about all three was unmistakable. How it came about that they knew this to be the moment when Lily desired to be unwatched and free, neither Dougal nor Katrin could have told. Lily had been roaming about the moor for a great part of the day, sometimes with Beenie, sometimes alone; but they had taken no more notice than usual. Perhaps they thought of the country custom which brings the wooer at nightfall; perhaps something magnetic was in the air. At all events this was the effect produced. They sat down in the early twilight, which had not yet quite lost its prolonged midsummer sweetness: and the moon was shining, whitening the great breadth of the moor, before they rose. They had neither heard nor seen anything of Lily on the previous evening, though she had gone out with more haste and less precaution than now; but her movements to-night seemed to send the thrill of a pulse beating all through the gaunt, high

house. Each of them heard her flit downstairs, though her step was so light. The husband and wife gave each other a glance when they heard the sound, though it was no more than the softest touch of the big hall door as she drew it behind her; and Beenie raised her voice instinctively to drown the noise, as if it had been something loud and violent. They all thought they heard her step upon the grass, which was impossible, and the sound of another step meeting hers. They were all conscious to their finger-tips of what poor little Lily was about, or what they thought she was about; though, indeed, Lily had flown forth like a dove, making no noise at all, even in her own excited ears.

And as for any sound of their steps upon the mossy greenness of the grass that intersected the heather, and made so soft a background for the big hummocks of the ling, there was no such thing that any but fairy ears could have heard. Ronald was standing in the same place, at the foot of the tower, when Lily flew out, noiseless, with the plaid over her arm. He had brought a basket of fish, which he placed softly within the hall door.

"You see I am not, after all, a fisher for nothing," he whispered, as he put the soft plaid about her shoulders.

"Whisht! don't say anything," said Lily, "till we are further off the house."

"You don't trust them, then?" he said.

"Oh, I trust them! but it's a little dreadful to think one has to trust anybody and to be afraid of what a servant will say."

"So it is," he agreed, "but that is one of the minor evils we must just put up with, Lily. We would not if

we could help it. Still, when your uncle compels you and me to proceedings like this, he must bear the guilt of it—if there is any guilt.”

“‘Guilt’ is a big word,” said Lily; and then she added, “I suppose it is what a great many do, and think no shame.”

“Shame!” he said, “for two lovers to meet that are kept apart for no reason in the world! If we were to meet Sir Robert face to face I hope my Lily would not blush, and certainly there would be no shame in me. He dared us to it when he sent you away, and I don’t see how he can expect anything different. I would be a poor creature if, when I was free myself, I let my bonnie Lily droop alone.”

“A poor Lily you would have found me if it had lasted much longer,” she said, “but oh! Ronald, never think of that now. Here we are together, and we believe in each other, which is all we want. To doubt, that is the dreadful thing—to think that perhaps there are other thoughts not like your own in his mind: and that, however you may meet, and however near you may be, you never know what he may be thinking.” Lily shuddered a little, notwithstanding that he had put the plaid so closely round her, and that her arm was within his.

“Yes,” said Ronald, “and don’t you think there might be the same dread in him? that his Lily was doubting him—not trusting—perhaps turning away to other—”

“Don’t say that, Ronald, for it is not possible. You could not ever have doubted me. Don’t say that, or I’ll never speak to you again.”

"And why not I as well as you?" said Ronald. "There is just as much occasion. I believe there is no occasion, Lily. Don't mistake me again—but just as much occasion."

She looked at him for a moment with her face changing, as he repeated: "Just as much occasion." And then, with a happy sigh: "Which is none," she said.

"On either side. The one the same as the other. Promise me you will always keep to that, and never change your mind."

She only smiled in reply—words did not seem necessary. They understood each other without any such foolish formula. And how was it possible she should change her mind? how ever go beyond that moment, which was eternity, which held all time within the bliss of its content? The entreaty to keep to that seemed to Lily to be without meaning. This was always; this was for ever. Her mind could no more change than the great blue peak of Schehallion could change, standing up against the lovely evening sky. She had recognised her mistake, with what pride and joy! and that was over for ever. It was a chapter never to be opened again.

The lingering sunset died over the moor, with every shade of colour that the imagination could conceive. The heather flamed now pink, now rose, now crimson, now purple; little clouds of light detached themselves from the pageant of the sunset, and floated all over the blue, like rose leaves scattered and floating on a heavenly breeze; the air over the hills thrilled with a vibration more delicate than that of the heat, but in a similar

confusion, like water, above the blue edges of the mountains. Then the evening slowly dimmed, the colours going out upon the moor, tint by tint, though they still lingered in the sky; then in the east, which had grown grey and wistful, came up, all at once, the white glory of the moon. It was such an evening as only belongs to the North. An enchanted hour, neither night nor day, bound by no vulgar conditions, lasting for ever, like Lily's mood, no limits or boundaries to it, floating in infinite vastness and stillness between heaven and earth. The two who, being together, perfected this spotless period, wandered over all the moor, not thinking where they were going, winding out and in among the bushes of the heather, wherever the spongy turf would bear a footstep. They forgot that they were afraid of being seen; but, indeed, there was nobody to see them, not a soul on the high road nor on the moor. They forgot all chances of betrayal, all doubts about Sir Robert's servants—everything, indeed, except that they were together and had a thousand things to say to each other, or nothing at all to say to each other, as sometimes happened, the silence being as sweet as the talk, and the pair changing from one to the other as caprice dictated; now all still, breathing like one being; now garrulous as the morning birds. They forgot themselves so far that, after two or three false partings Ronald taking Lily home, then Lily accompanying Ronald back again to the edge of the moor, he walked with her at last to the very foot of the tower, from whence he had first called her, though there were audible voices just round the corner, clearly denoting that the other inmates were taking a breath of air after their supper, at the ha'

door. There was almost a pleasure in the risk, in coming close up to those bystanders, yet unseen and whispering the last good-night almost within reach of their ears.

"I do not see why I should carry on the farce of fishing all day long," said Ronald, "and see you only in the evening. You can get out as easily in the afternoon as in the evening, Lily."

"Oh, yes, quite as easy. Nobody minds me where I go."

"Then come down to the waterside. It is not too far for you to walk. I will be by way of fishing up the stream; and I will bring my lunch in my pocket and we will have a little picnic together, you and me."

"I will do that, Ronald; but the evening is the bonnie time. The afternoon is just vulgar day, and this is the enchanted eve. It is all poetry now."

"It is you that are the poetry, Lily. Me, I'm only common flesh and blood."

"It is the two of us that make the poetry," said Lily, "but the afternoon will be fine, too, and I will come. I will allow you to catch no fish—little bonnie things; why should they not be happy in the water, like us on the bank?"

"I like very well to see them in the basket, and to feel I have been so clever as to catch them," said Ronald.

"And so do I," cried Lily, with a laugh so frank that they were both startled into silence, feeling that the audience round the corner had stopped their talk to listen. This—the reader will see, not all protestations, not all sighs of sentiment—was the manner of their talk

before they finally parted, Ronald making a long circuit so as to emerge unseen and lower down upon the high road, on the other side of the moor. Was it necessary to make any such make-believe? Lily walked round the corner, with a blush yet a smile, holding her head high, looking her possible critics in the face. It was Dougal and Katrin, who had come out of doors to breathe the air after their supper, and to see the bonnie moor. Within, in the shadow of the stairs, was a vision of Beenie, very nervous, her eyes round and shining with eagerness and suspense. Lily coming in view—all radiant in the glory of her youth, full of happiness, full of life, too completely inspired and lighted up with the occasion to take any precautions of concealment—was like a revelation. She was youth and joy and love impersonified, coming out upon the lower level of common life, which was all these good people knew, like a star out of the sky. Katrin, arrested with a question on her lips, gazed at her with a woman's ready perception of the new and wonderful atmosphere about her. Dougal, half as much impressed, but not knowing why, pushed his cap on one side as usual, inserting an interrogative finger among the masses of his grizzled hair.

"So you've been taking your walk, Miss Lily," said Katrin, subdued out of the greater vigour of remark which she had been about to use.

"Yes, Katrin, while you have been having your supper. Your voices sound very nice downstairs while you are having your cracks, but they make me feel all the more lonely by myself. It's more company on the moor," Lily said, with an irrestrainable laugh. She meant, I suppose, to deceive—that is, she had no desire

to betray herself to those people who might betray her—but she was so unused to any kind of falsehood, that she brought out her ambiguous phrase so as to make it imply, if not express, the truth.

“I am glad you should find it company, Miss Lily. It’s awfu’ bonnie and fresh and full of fine smells—the gale under your foot and the wholesome heather, and a’ thae bonnie little flowers.”

“Losh me! I would find them puir company for my part,” said Dougal, “but there is, maybe—”

“Hold your peace, you coof. Do ye think the like of you can faddom a young leddy that is just close kin to everything that’s bonnie? You, an auld gillie, a Highland tyke, a—”

“Don’t abuse Dougal—though you have paid me the prettiest compliment. Could I have the powny tomorrow, Dougal, to go down the water a bit? and I will take a piece with me, Katrin, in case I should be late: and then you need never fash your heads about me whether I come in to dinner or not.”

“My bonnie leddy, I like everybody to come in to their denner,” said Katrin, with a cloud upon her face.

“So do I, in a usual way. But I have been here a long time—how long, Beenie? A whole month! fancy that! and they tell me there is a very bonnie glen down by the old bridge that people go to see.”

“So there is, a real bonnie bit. I’ll take ye there some day mysel’: and Beenie, she can come in the cairt with the black powny, gin she likes. She’ll mind it well—a’ the bairns are keen to gang in the vacance to the Fairy Glen.”

“I’ll not wait for Beenie this time, or you either,

Dougal," said Lily, again with a laugh. "I will just take Rory for my guide and find it out for myself. I think," she added, with a deeper blush and a faltering voice, "that Miss Helen from the Manse—"

She did not get far enough to tell that faltering fib. "Oh, if you are to be with Miss Eelen! Miss Eelen knows every corner of the Fairy Glen. I will be very easy in my mind," said Katrin, "if Miss Eelen's there: and I'll put up that cold chicken in a basket, and ye shall have a nice lunch as ever two such nice creatures could sit down to. But ye'll mind not to wet your feet, nor climb up the broken arch of the auld brig yonder. Eh, but that's an exploit for a stirring boy, and no a diversion for leddies. And ye'll just give the powny a good feed, and take him out a while in the morning, Dougal, that he mayna be too fresh."

"I'm just thinking," said Dougal, "there's a dale to do the morn; but if ye were to wait till the day after, I could spare the time, Miss Lily, to take you mysel'."

"And if it's just preceesely the morn that Miss Eelen's coming!" cried Katrin, with great and solid effect, while Lily, alarmed, began to explain and deprecate, pleading that she could find the way herself so easily, and would not disturb Dougal for the world. She hurried in after this little episode to avoid any further dangers, to be met by Beenie's round eyes and troubled face in the dark under the stair. "Oh, Miss Lily!" Beenie cried, putting a hand of remonstrance on her arm, which Lily shook off and flew upstairs, very happy, it must be allowed, in her first attempt at deceit. Robina looked more scared and serious than ever when she appeared with a lighted candle in the drawing-room,

shaking her solemn head. Her eyes were so round, and her look so solemn, that she looked not unlike a large white owl in the imperfect light—and so Lily told her with tremulous laugh, to avert, if possible, the coming storm. But Beenie's storm, though confused and full of much vague rumble of ineffectual thunder, was not to be averted. She repeated her undefined but powerful remonstrance, "Oh, Miss Lily!" as she set down the one small candle in the midst of the darkness, with much shaking of her head.

"Well, what is it? Stop shaking your head, or you will shake it off, and you and me will break our backs looking for it on the floor—and speak out your mind and be done with it," cried Lily, stamping her foot upon the carpet. Robina made a solemn pause before she repeated, still more emphatically, her "Oh, Miss Lily!" again.

"To bring in Miss Eelen's name—puir thing, puir thing, that has nothing to do with such vanities—just to give ye a countenance and be a screen to you, and you going to meet your lad, and no leddy near ye at a'."

"Don't speak so loud," cried Lily, with an affectation of alarm: and then she added, "I never said Helen was coming—I only—"

"Put it so that Katrin thought that was what you meant. Oh, I ken fine! It's no a falsehood, you say, but it's a falsehood you put into folk's heads. And, 'deed, Katrin was a great fool to take heed for a moment of what you said—when it was just written plain in your eyes and every line of your countenance, and the very gown on your back, that you had come from a meeting with your lad!"

"I wish you would not use such common words, Beenie, as if I were the housemaid meeting my lad!"

"I fail to see where the difference lies," said Beenie with dignity, "the thing's just the same. You're maybe no running the risks a poor lass runs, that has naebody to take care of her. But this is no more than the second time he's come, and lo! there's a wall of lees rising round your feet already, trippin' ye up at every step. What will ye say to Katrin, Miss Lily, the morn's night when ye come hame? Will ye keep it up and pretend till her that Miss Eelen's met ye at the auld brig? or will ye invent some waur story to account for her no coming? or what, I ask ye, will ye do?"

"Katrin," said Lily, with burning cheeks, but a haughty elevation of the head—"has no right to cross-question me."

"Nor me either, Miss Lily, ye will be thinking?"

"It does not matter what I'm thinking. She is one thing and you are another. I have told you—Oh, Beenie, Beenie!" cried the girl suddenly, "why do you begin to make objections so soon? What am I doing more than other girls do?—Who is it I am deceiving? nobody! Uncle Robert wanted to make me promise I would give him up—but I would not promise. I never said I would not see him and speak to him and make him welcome if he came to me—there was never a word of that between us. And as for Katrin!" cried Lily with scorn, "why, Grace Scott met Robbie Bruce out at Duddingston, and told her mother she had only been walking with her cousin, and you just laughed when you told me. And her mother! very different, very different from Katrin. You said what an ill lassie! but you

laughed, and you said Mrs. Scott was wrong to force them to it. That was all the remark you made, Robina, my dear woman," said Lily, recovering her spirit; "so I am not going to put up with any criticism from you—"

"Oh, Miss Lily," Robina said: but what could she add to this mild remonstrance, having thus been convicted of a sympathy with the vagaries of lovers which she did not indeed deny. And it cannot be said that poor Lily's suggested falsehood did much harm. Katrin, for her part, had very little faith in Miss Eelen as the companion of the young lady's ramble. She too shook her head as she packed her basket. "I see now," she said, "the meaning o't, which is aye a satisfaction. It's some fine lad that hasna siller enough to please Sir Robert. And he's come after her, and they're counting on a wheen walks and cracks together, poor young things. Maybe if she had had a mother it would have been different—or if poor Mr. James had lived, poor man, to take care of his ain bit bairn. Sir Robert's a dour auld carl; he's not one I would put such a charge upon. What does he ken about a young leddy's heart, poor thing? But they shall have a good lunch, whatever," the good woman said.

And when the sun was high over the moor and everything shining—not too hot nor too bright, the tempered and still-breathing noon of the North—Lily set out upon her pony with the basket by her saddle, and all the world smiling and inviting before her. Never had such a daring and delightful holiday dawned upon her before. Almost a whole day to spend together—Ronald all that she dreamed, and not an inquisitive or unkindly eye to look upon them, not even Beenie to

disturb their absorption in each other. She waved her whip in salutation to the others behind as they stood watching her set out. "A bonnie day to ye, Miss Lily," cried Katrin. "And you'll no be late?" said anxious Beenie. "'Od," cried Dougal with his cap on his ear, "I wish I had just put off thae potataies and gone with her mysel'—" "Ye fuil," said his wife, and said no further word. And Lily rode away in heavenly content and expectation over the moor.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE day was one of those Highland days which are a dream of freshness and beauty and delight. I do not claim that they are very frequent, but sometimes they will occur in a cluster, two or three together, like a special benediction out of heaven. The sun has a purity, a clearness, an ecstasy of light, which it has nowhere else. It looks, as it were, with a heavenly compunction, upon earth and sky, as if to make up for the many days when it is absent, expanding over mountain and moor with a smiling which seems personal and full of intention. The air is life itself, uncontaminated with any evil emanation, full of the warmth of the sun, and the odour of the fir trees and heather, and the murmur of all the living things about. The damp and dew which linger in the shady places disappear as if by magic. No unkindly creature, no venomous thing is abroad: no noise, no jar of living, though everything lives and grows and makes progress with such silence and smiling vigour. The two lovers in the midst of

this incense-breathing nature—so still, yet so strong, so peaceful, yet so vigorous—felt that the scene was made for them, that no surroundings could have been more fitly prepared and tempered for the group which was as the group in Eden, before trouble came. They wandered about together through the glen, and by the side of the shining brown trout stream, which glowed and smiled among the rocks, reflecting every ray and every cloud as it hurried and sparkled along, always in haste yet always at leisure. They lingered here and there, in a spot which was still more beautiful than all the others, though not so beautiful as the next which tempted them a little further on. Sometimes Ronald's rod was taken out and screwed together; sometimes even flung over a dark pool, where there were driftings and leapings of trout—but pulled in again before, as Lily said, any harm was done. "For why should any peaceful creature get a sharp hook in its jaw because you and me are happy?" she said: "that's no reason." Ronald, but for the pride of having something to carry back in his basket, was much of her opinion. He was not a devoted fisherman. Their happiness was no reason, clearly, for interfering with that of the meanest thing that lived. And they talked about everything in heaven and earth, not only of their own affairs, though they were interesting enough. Lily—who for a month had seen nobody except Beenie, save for that one visit to the Manse—had such an accumulation of remark and observation to get through on her side, and so much to demand from him, that the moments, and, indeed, the hours, flew. It is astonishing, even without the impulse of a long parting and sudden meeting, what wells of

conversation flow forth between two young persons in their circumstances. Perhaps it would not sound very wise or witty if any cool spectator listened, but it is always delightful to the people concerned, and Lily was not the first comer, as the French say. She was full of variety, full of whim and fancy, no heaviness or monotony in her. Perhaps this matters less at such a moment of life than at any other. The dullest pair find the art of entertaining each other, of keeping up their mutual interest. And now that the cold chill of doubt in respect to Ronald was removed from her mind, Lily flowed like the trout stream—as dauntless and as gay, reflecting every gleam of light.

“The worst thing is,” Ronald said, “that the Vacation will come to an end—not now or soon, Heaven be praised!—but the time will come when I shall have to go back and pace the Parliament House, as of old, and my Lily will be left alone in the wilderness.”

“Not alone, as I was before,” said Lily; “never that any more; for now I have something to remember, and something to look forward to. You’ve been here, Ronald; nothing can take that from us. I will come and sit on this stone, and say to myself, ‘Here we spent the day; and here we had our picnic; and this was what he said.’ And I will laugh at your jokes over again.”

“Ah!” he said, “it’s but a grim entertainment that. I went and stood behind those curtains in that window, do you remember, in George Square? and said to myself, ‘Here my Lily was; and here she said—’ But, instead of laughing, I was much more near crying. You will not find much good in that.”

“You crying!” she said, with the water in her eyes,

and a little soft, reproving blow of her fingers upon his cheek. "I do not believe it. But I daresay I shall cry and then laugh. What does it matter which? They are just the same—for a girl. And then I shall say to myself, 'At the New Year he is coming back again, and then—'"

"What shall we do at the New Year?" he said. "No days like this then. How can I take my Lily out on the moor among the snow?"

"If I am a Lily, I am one that can bloom anywhere; in the snow as well as the sun."

"And so you are, my dearest, making a sunshine in a shady place. But still we must think of that. Winter and summer are two different things. Cannot we find a friend to take us in?"

"I will tell you where we shall find a friend. You'll come to the tower with your boldest face, as if it was the first time you had been here. And you will ask, 'Does Miss Ramsay live here?' And Katrin will say, 'Deed does she, sir. Here and no other place.' And you will smite your thigh in surprise, and say, 'I thought I had heard that! I am a friend from Edinburgh, and I just stopped on the road to (here say any name you please), to say "Good-day" to the young lady, if she was here.' And then you will look about, and you will say, 'It is rather a lonesome place.'"

"Go on," said Ronald, laughing, "I like the dialogue; though whether we should trust your keepers so far as that—"

"My keepers! They are my best of friends! Well, Katrin will look round too, and she will say, as if con-

sidering the subject for the first time, 'In winter it is, maybe, a wee lonesome—for a young leddy. Ye'll maybe be a friend of Sir Robert's, too?' And you will say, 'Oh, yes, I am a great friend of Sir Robert's.' And she will open the door wide and say, 'Come ben, sir, come ben. It will be a great divert to our young leddy to see a visitor. And you're kindly welcome,' that's what she will say."

"Will she say all that, and shall I say all that? Perhaps I shall, including that specious phrase about being a friend of Sir Robert's—which would surprise Sir Robert very much."

"Well, you know him surely, and you are not unfriends. It strikes me that, to be a lawyer, Ronald, you are full of scruples."

"What a testimonial to my virtue!" he said, with a laugh. "But it is not scruples, it is pure cowardice, Lily. Are they to be trusted? If Sir Robert were to be written to, and I to be forbidden the door, and my Lily carried off to a worse wilderness—abroad—as he threatened!"

"I will tell you one thing: I will not go!" said Lily, "not if Sir Robert were ten times my uncle. But you need not fear for Katrin. She likes me better than Sir Robert. You may think that singular, but so it is. And I am much more fun," cried Lily, "far more interesting! I include you, and you and me together—we are a story, we are a romance! And Katrin will like us better than one of the Waverley novels, and she will be true to us to the last drop of her blood."

"These Highlanders, you never can be sure of them," said Ronald, shaking his head. He spoke the sentiment

of his time and district, which was too near the Highland line to put much confidence in the Celt.

"But she is not a Highlander. She is Aberdeen," cried Lily. "Beenie is a Highlander, if you call Kinloch-Rugas Highland, and she is as true as steel. Oh, you are a person of prejudices, Ronald; but I trust all the world," she cried, lifting her fine and shining face to the shining sky.

"And so do I," he cried, "to-day." And they paused amid all considerations of the past and future, to remember the glory of the present hour, and how sweet it was above everything that it should be to-day.

Thus the afternoon fled. They made their little table in the sunshine, for shade is not as desirable in a Highland glen as in a Southern valley, and ate their luncheon merrily together, Lily recounting, with a little shame, how it had been intended for Helen Blythe instead of Ronald Lumsden. "I was very near telling a fib," she said, compunctiously, "but I did not do it. I left it to Katrin's imagination."

"Helen Blythe must have a robust appetite if all this was for her," he said. "Is this an effort of imagination, too? But come, Lily, we must do our duty by the view. There is the old brig to climb, and all the fairy glen to see."

"I promised not to climb the old brig," she said. "But that promise, I suppose, was only to hold in case it was Helen Blythe that was with me, for she could give little help if I slipped, whereas you—"

"I? I hope I can take care of my Lily," said the young man; and after they had packed their basket, and put it ready to be tied once more to Rory's saddle,

who was picnicing, too, on the grass, in one continuous and delicate meal, they wandered off, together, to make the necessary pilgrimage, though the old brig and the fairy glen attracted but little of the attention of the pair, so fully engrossed in each other. They climbed the broken arch, however, which was half embedded in the slope of the bank, and overgrown with every kind of green and flourishing thing, arm in arm, Ronald swinging his companion lightly over the dangerous bits, for love—while Lily, for love, consented to be aided, though little needing the aid. And how it happened will never be known, but their happy progress came to a sudden pause on an innocent bit of turf, where no peril was. If it were Ronald who stepped false, or Lily, neither of them could tell, but in a moment calamity came. He disengaged himself from her, almost roughly, pushing her away, and thus, instead of dragging her with him, crashed down alone through the briers and bushes, with a noise which, to Lily, filled the air like thunder. When she had slipped and stumbled in her fright and anxiety after him, she found him lying, trying to laugh, but with his face contorted with pain, among the nettles and weeds at the bottom. “What has happened! What has happened!” she cried.

“What an ass I am,” said he, “and what a nuisance for you, Lily. I believe I have sprained my ankle—of all the silly things to do! and at this time, of all others, betraying you!”

Lily, I need not say, was for a moment at her wits' end. There were no ambulance classes in those days, nor attempts to train young ladies in the means of first help. But there is always the light of nature, a thing

much to be trusted to, all the same. Lily took his handkerchief, because it was the largest, and bound up his foot, as far as that was possible, cutting open the boot with his knife; and then they held a brief council of war. Ronald wished to be left there while she went for help, but there was no likelihood of obtaining help nearer than Kinloch-Rugas, and finally it was decided that, in some way or other, he should struggle on to Rory's back, and so be led to the Manse, where a welcome and aid were sure to be found. It was a terrible business getting this accomplished, but with patience, and a good deal of pain, it was done at last—the injured foot supported *tant bien que mal* in the stirrup—and a woeful little group set forth on the way to the village. But I do wrong to say it was a woeful group, for, though the pain made Ronald faint, and though Lily's heart was full of anguish and anxiety, they both exerted themselves to the utmost, each for the sake of the other. Lily led the reluctant pony along, sometimes running by his side, sometimes dragging him with both her hands, too much occupied for thought. What people would think did not occur to her yet. People might think what they liked so long as she got him safe to the Manse. She knew that they would be kind to him there. But what an end it was to the loveliest of days; and the sun was beginning to get low, and the road so long.

“Oh, Rory, man!” cried poor Lily, apostrophising the pony, after the manner of Dougal. “If you would only go steady and go soft to-day! To-morrow you may throw me if you like, and I will never mind; but oh, go canny, if there is any heart in you, to-day!” I think that Rory felt the appeal by some magnetism in her touch if

not by her words, on which point I cannot say anything positively; but he did at least overcome his flightiness, and accomplished the last half of the road at a steady trot, which gave Ronald exquisite pain, and kept Lily running, but shortened considerably the period of their suffering. They were received with a great outcry of sympathy and compassion at the Manse, where Ronald was laid out at once on the big haircloth sofa, and his foot relieved as much as Helen's skill, which was not inconsiderable, could do. It was he who made the necessary explanations, Lily, in her trouble, having quite forgot the necessity for them.

"I was so happy," he said, "so fortunate as to be seen by Miss Ramsay, who knew me—the only creature hereabouts who does; and you see what she has done for me; helped me to struggle up, put me on her pony, and brought me here: a perfect good Samaritan."

"Oh, don't, don't speak like that!" said Lily, in her distress. She felt she could not at this moment bear the lie. Nobody had ever seen Lily Ramsay so dishevelled before; her hair shaken out by her run, her skirt torn where she had caught her foot in it in her struggles to help Ronald, and covered with the dust of the road.

"She would just be that," said Helen Blythe, receiving the narrative with faith undoubting; "and what a good thing it was you, my dear, that knew the gentleman, and not a strange person! And what a grand thing that you were riding upon Rory! Just lie as quiet as you can, the hot bathing will relieve the pain, and now the boot's off ye'll be easier: and the doctor will come in to see you as soon as he comes home. Don't ye make a

movement, sir, that ye can help. Just lie quiet—lie quiet! that is the chief remedy of all.”

“He is Mr. Lumsden, Helen,” said Lily, composed, “a friend of my uncle’s from Edinburgh. Oh, I am glad he is in your hands. He had slipped down the broken arch at the old brig, where all the tourists go; and I had ridden there to-day, just to see it.”

“Eh, my dear, how thankful you must be,” was all Helen’s reply; but it seemed to Lily that the old minister in his big chair by the fireside gave her a glance which was not so all-believing as Helen’s.

“It was just an extraordinary piece of good luck for the young man,” the minister said. “Things seldom happen so pat in real life. But a young lady like you, Miss Lily, likes the part of the good Samaritan.”

She could not look him full in the face, and the laugh with which he ended his speech seemed the most cruel of mocking sounds to poor Lily. She put up her hands to her tumbled hair.

“May I go to your room and make myself tidy?” she said. “I had to run most of the way with Rory, and my skirt so long for riding. I don’t know what sort of dreadful person they must have thought me in the town.”

“Nobody but will think all the better of you for your kindness,” said Helen, “and we’ll soon mend your skirt, for there’s really little harm done. And I think you should have the gig from the inn to drive you back, my dear, for your nerves are shaken, and the afternoon’s getting late, and you must not stir from here till you have got a good rest and a cup of tea.”

“The gig may perhaps take me back to the inn first,”

said Ronald, "for it is there I am staying—for the fishing," he added, unable to keep out of his eyes a half comic glance at the companion of his trouble.

"Indeed, you are going back to no inn," said Helen, "you are just going to stay at the Manse, where you will be much better attended to; and Lily, my dear, you'll come and see Mr. Lumsden, that owes so much to you already; and that will help to make him feel at home here."

But when Lily came downstairs, smoothed and brushed, with her hair trim, and the flush dying off her cheeks, and her skirt mended, though in many ways the accident had ended most fortunately, she could not meet the smile in the old minister's eyes.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE was great excitement in the tower when the gig from "the toun" was seen slowly climbing the brae. Almost everybody in the house was in commotion, and Beenie, half-crazy with anxiety, had been at the window for hours watching for Lily's return, and indulging in visions and conjectures which her companions knew nothing of. All that Dougal and Katrin thought of was an accident. Though, as they assured each other, Rory's bark was worse than his bite, it was yet quite possible that in one of his cantrips he might have thrown the inexperienced rider in her long skirt; and even if she was not hurt, she might have found it impossible to catch him again, and might have to toil home on foot, which would account for the lateness of the hour. Or

she might have sprained her ankle, or even broken her arm as she fell, and been unable to move. When these fears began to take shape, the boy had been sent off flying on the black pony to the scene of the picnic, the only argument against this hypothesis being that, had any such accident happened, Rory by this time would, in all probability, have reached home by himself. Beenie, I need not say, was tormented by other fears. Was it possible that they had fled together, these two who had now fully discovered that they could not live without each other? Had he carried her away, as it had been on the cards he should have done three months ago? and a far better solution than any other of the problem. These ideas alternated in Robina's mind with the suggestion of an accident. She did not believe in an accident. Lily had always been masterful, able to manage anything that came in her way, "beast or bird," as Beenie said, and was it likely she would be beaten by Rory, a little Highland powny, when she had ridden big horses by Sir Robert's side, and never tumbled? Na. "She'll just have gone away with him," Beenie said to herself, and though she felt wounded that the plan had not been revealed to her, she was not sorry, only very anxious, feeling that Lily would certainly find some opportunity of sending her a word, and telling her where to join them. "It is maybe the best way out of it," she said over and over again to herself—and accordingly she was less moved by Katrin's wailings than that good woman could understand. Katrin and Dougal were out upon the road, while Beenie kept her station at the window. And Dougal's fears for the young lady were increased by alarms about his pony, an older and dearer

friend than Lily. "If the poor beast has broken his knees, I'll ne'er forgive myself for letting that bit lassie have the charge of him alone."

"The charge of him!" said his wife in high indignation, "and her that has maybe twisted her ankle, or broken her bonnie airm, the darlin', and a' the fault of that ill willy beast. And it's us that has the chairge of *her*."

This argument silenced Dougal for the moment, but he still continued to think quite as much of Rory as of the young lady, whichever of the two was responsible for the trouble which had occurred. When the boy came back to report that there was nothing to be found at the old brig but great marks on the ruin, as if somebody had "slithered down," branches torn away, and the herbage crushed at the bottom, the alarm in the house rose high. And Dougal had fixed his cap firmly on the top of his head, as a man prepared for any emergency, and taken his staff in his hand to take the short cut across the moor, and find out for himself what the catastrophe had been, when a shout from Sandy on the top of the bank, and Beenie at the window, stopped further proceedings. There was Lily, pale but smiling in the gig from the inn, and Rory tossing his red head, very indignant at the undignified position in which he found himself tied to that shabby equipage. "The puir beast, just nickering with joy at the sight of hame, but red with rage to be trailed at the tail of an inn geeg," Dougal said, hurrying to loose the rope and lead the sufferer in. He was not without concern for Lily, but she was evidently none the worse, and he asked no more.

"I have had such an adventure," she said, as soon as she was within hearing, "but I am not hurt, and nothing has happened to me. Such an adventure! What do you think, Beenie? A gentleman climbed up the old brig while we were there, and slipped and fell; and when I ran to see, who should it be but Mr. Lumsden—Ronald Lumsden—whom we used to see so much in Edinburgh." Here Lily's countenance bloomed so suddenly red out of her paleness, that Katrin had a shock of understanding, and saw it all in a moment, if not more than there was to see. "And he had sprained his ankle," Lily said, a paleness following the flush; "he couldn't move. You may fancy what a state we were in."

"Eh," said Katrin with her eyes fixed on Lily's face, "what a good thing Miss Eelen was with you—for she kens as much about that sort o' thing as the doctor himsel'."

"I got him on the pony at last," said Lily, and we bound up his foot, and then we took him to the Manse. It was the nearest, and the doctor just at their door. But oh, what a race I had with the pony, leading him, and sometimes he led me till I had to run; and I put my foot through my skirt, see! drew it out of the gathers. We mended it up a little at the Manse; but look here, a job for you, Beenie. And my hair came down about my shoulders, and if you had seen the figure I was, running along the road—"

"But Miss Eelen with ye made a' right," said Katrin; "ah, what a blessing that Miss Eelen was with ye."

Lily was getting out of the gig, from the high seat of which she had hastened to make her first explanations. It was not an easy thing getting out of a high

gig in those days, and "the geeg from the inn" was, naturally, without any of the latest improvements. She had to turn her back to the spectators as she clambered down, and if her laugh sounded a little unsteady that was quite natural. "She is indeed as good as the doctor," she said; "if you had seen how she cut open the boot, and made him comfortable! And Rory behaved very well too," she said. "I spoke to him in his ear as you do, Dougal. I said, 'Rory, Rory, my bonnie man, go canny to-day—you can throw me to-morrow, if you like, and I'll never mind, but oh, go canny to-day!'" And you did, Rory, you dear little fellow, and dragged me, with my hair flying like a wild creature, along the road," she added with a laugh, taking the rough and tossing head into her hands, and aiming a kiss at Rory's shaggy forehead. But the pony was not used to such dainties, and tossed himself out of her hands.

"You're awfu' tired, Miss Lily, though you're putting so good a face upon it, and awfu' shaken with the excitement, and a' that. And to think o' you being the one to find him—just the right person, the one that knew him—and to think of him being here, Maister Lumsden, touring or shooting or something, I suppose."

Beenie's speech ended spasmodically in a fierce grip of the arm with which Lily checked her as she went upstairs. "What need have you," said the young lady in an angry whisper, "to burden your mind with lies? Say I have to do it, and oh, I hate it! but you have no need. Hold your tongue and keep your conscience free."

"Eh, Miss Lily," said Beenie in the same tone, "I'm

no wanting to be better than you. If ye tell a lee, and it's but an innocent lee, I'll tell one too. If you're punished for it, what am I that I shouldna take my share with my mistress? But about the sprainin' o' the ankle, my bonnie dear, that's a' true?"

Lily answered with a laugh to the sudden doubt in Robina's eyes. She was very much excited, too much so to feel how tired she was, and capable of nothing without either laughter or tears. "Oh, yes, it's quite true: and oh, Beenie, he is badly hurt and suffering a great deal of pain. Poor Ronald! But he will be safe in Helen's hands. If he were only out of pain. Perhaps it is a good thing, Beenie. That is what he whispered when I came away. Oh, how hard it was to come away and leave him there ill, and his foot so bad! But I am to go down to-morrow, and it will be a duty to stay as long as I can to cheer him up and to save Helen trouble, who has so many other things to do. I am not hard-hearted, but he says himself, if he were only out of pain—perhaps it's a good thing."

Here Lily stopped and cried, and murmured among her tears, "If it had only been me! it's easier for a girl to bear pain than a man."

"But if it had been you, Miss Lily, it would have been no advantage. You can go to him at the Manse, but he could not have come to you here."

"That is true," cried Lily, laughing, "you are a clever Beenie to think of that. But how am I to live till to-morrow, all the long night through, and all the morning without news?"

"A young gentleman doesna die of a sprained ankle," said Beenie, sedately, "and if you are a good bairn,

and will go early to your bed, and take care of yourself, I'll see that the boy goes into the town the first thing in the morning to hear how he is."

"You are a kind Beenie," cried Lily, clasping her arms about her maid's neck. But it was a long time before Robina succeeded in quieting the girl's excitement. She had to hear the story again half-a-dozen times over, now in its full reality, now in the form which it had to bear for the outside world, with all the tears and laughter which accompanied it. "And he grew so white, so white, I thought he was going to faint," said Lily, herself growing pale.

"I'm thankful ye were spared that. It is very distressing to see a person faint, Miss Lily."

"And then he cheered up and gave a grin in the middle of his pain: I will not call it a smile, for it was no more than a grin—half fun and half torture. Poor Ronald—oh, my poor lad, my poor lad!"

"He was a lucky lad to get you to do all that for him, Miss Lily."

"Me! What did it matter if it was me, or you, or a fishwife," said Lily, "when a man is in such dreadful pain?"

They discussed it over and over again from every point of view, until Lily fell asleep from sheer weariness in the hundredth repetition of the story. Beenie, for her part, was exceedingly discreet at supper that evening. Indeed, she was altogether too discreet to be successful with a quick observer like Katrin, who saw, by the extreme precautions of her friend, and the close-shut lips with which Beenie minced and bridled, and made little remarks about nothing in particular, that there was some-

thing to conceal. Katrin was very near to penetrating the mystery even now, but she said nothing except those somewhat ostentatious congratulations to all parties on the fact that Miss Eelen was there, which were designed to show the growing conviction that Miss Eelen was not there at all. As for Dougal he was chiefly occupied by the address to Rory which Lily had made, which struck him as an excellent joke, and which he repeated to himself from time to time, with a laugh which came from the depths of his being. "She said till him, 'Ye can throw me the morn, and welcome, if ye'll go canny the day.' Losh, what a spirit she has, that lassie, and the fun in her! 'Go canny the day, and ye can throw me, if ye like, the morn.' And Rory to take it a' in like a Christian!" He laughed till he held his sides, and then he said, feebly, "It'll be the death of me."

The joke did not strike the women as so brilliant. "I hope he'll no take her at her word," said Beenie.

"Na, na, he'll no take her at her word: he's ower much of a gentleman; but if he does you'll see she'll stand it and never a word in her head. That's what I call real spirit, 'feard at nothing. 'Go canny the day, and you can throw me, if you like, the morn.' I think I never heard anything so funny in a' my born days."

"You're easy pleased," said his wife, though she was quite inclined to consider Lily's speeches as brilliant, and herself as the flower of humankind; but to let a man suppose that he was the discoverer of all this was not to be thought of. She communicated, however, some of her suspicions to Dougal, for want of any other confidant, when they were alone in the stillness of their chamber. "I have my doubts," said Katrin, "that it was

nae surprise to her at a' to find the gentleman, and that it was him that was the Miss Eelen that met her at the auld brig."

"Him that was Miss Eelen? And how could he be Miss Eelen, a muckle man," said Dougal.

"Oh, ye gowk!" said his wife, and she put back her discoveries into her bosom, and said no more.

Lily was very restless next day until she was able to get away on her charitable mission. "I must go now," she said, "to help to take care of him, or Helen will have no time for her other business, and she has so much to do."

"You maun take care and no find another gentleman with a broken foot," said Katrin, "you mightn't be able to manage Rory so well a second time."

"Oh, I am not afraid of Rory," the girl cried. "I just speak to him, as Dougal does, in his ear."

"Mind you what you've promised him, Miss Lily," said that authority, chuckling; "he is to cowp you over his head, if he likes, the day."

"He'll not do that," cried Lily, confidently, waving her hand to the assembled household, who were standing outside the door to see her start. What a diversion she was, with her comings and goings, her adventures and mishaps, to that good pair! How dull it must have been for them before Lily came to excite their curiosity and brighten their sense of humour. Dougal returned to his work, shaking once more with a laugh that went down to his boots and thrilled him all over, saying to himself, "He's ower much of a gentleman to take her at her word;" while Katrin stood shading her eyes with her hand, and looking wistfully after the young creature

in her confidence and gaiety of youth. "Eh, but I hope the lad's wordy of her," was what Katrin said.

Ronald was lying once more upon the big haircloth sofa, as she had left him. He would not stay in bed, Helen lamented, though it would have been so much better for him. "But a simple sprain," she said, "no complication. If I could have persuaded him to bide quiet in his bed he would have been well at the end of the week; but nothing would please him but to be down here, limping downstairs, at the risk of a fall, with two sticks and only one foot. My heart was in my mouth at every step."

"But he is none the worse," cried Lily, "and I can understand Mr. Lumsden, Helen. It is far, far more cheery here, where he can see everything that is going on, and have you and Mr. Blythe to talk to. A sprain makes your ankle bad, but not your mind."

"That is true," said Ronald, "and what I have been labouring to say, but had not the wit. My ankle is bad, but not my mind. I am in no such hurry to get well as Miss Blythe thinks. Don't you see," he said, looking up in Lily's face, as she stood beside him, "in what clover I am here?"

Lily answered the look, but not the words. A tremulous sense of ease and happiness arose in her being. The moor was sweet when he was there, and to look for that hour in the evening had been enough for the first days to make her happy. But to start out to meet him, nobody knowing, glad as she had been to do it, cost Lily a pang. There are some people to whom the stolen joys are the most sweet, but Lily was not one of these. The clandestine wounded her sense

of delicacy, if not her conscience. She was doing no wrong, she had said to herself, but yet it felt like wrong so long as it was secret, so long as a certain amount of deception was necessary to procure it. She was like the housemaid, stealing out to meet her lover. To the housemaid there was nothing unbecoming in that, but there was to Lily. She had suffered even while she was happy. But now the clandestine was all over. The constant presence of the old minister, who regarded them with eyes in which there was too much insight and satire for Lily's peace of mind, was troublesome, but it was protection—it set her heart at rest. The accident restored all at once the ease of nature. "It is the best thing that could have happened," Ronald said, when Helen left them alone, and Mr. Blythe had hidden himself behind the large, broad sheet of *The Scotsman*, the new clever Whig paper, which had lately begun to bring the luxury of news twice a week to the most distant corners of the land. "I don't mean to get better at the end of the week. It was a dreadful business yesterday, but I see the advantage of it now."

"Was it so dreadful yesterday, poor Ronald?" she said in the voice of a dove, cooing at his ear.

"It was not delightful yesterday, though I had the sweetest Lily. But now I warn you, Lily, I mean to keep ill as long as I can. You will come and stay with me—it is your duty—for nobody knows me at Kinloch-Rugas, but only you, and you are the Good Samaritan. You put me on your beast, and brought me to the inn."

"Oh, do not speak like that, do not put me in mind that we are both deceivers! I have forgotten it, now that we are here."

"We are no deceivers," he said. "It is all quite true—you put me on your own beast. And where did you get all that strength, Lily? You must have almost lifted me in your arms, you slender little thing, a heavy fellow like me!"

"Oh, you did very well on your one foot," said Lily, trying to laugh: but she shuddered and the tears came into her eyes. She was aching still with the strain that necessity had put upon her, but he did not think of that, he only thought how strong she was.

"Here, you two," said the minister, "I'm going to read you a bit out of the paper. It is just full of stories, as good as if I had told them myself."

"Oh, never heed with your stories, father," said Helen, "keep them till Lily goes away, for she has a wonderful way with her, and keeps things going. Our patient will not be dull while Lily is here."

Was that all she meant, or did Helen, too, suspect something? The two lovers interchanged a glance, half of alarm, half of laughter, but Helen went and came, unconscious, sometimes pausing to turn the cushion under the bad foot, or to suggest a more comfortable position, with nothing but kindness in her mild eyes.

CHAPTER XV.

RONALD was, as he had prophesied, a long time getting well. Even Helen was a little puzzled, she who thought no evil, at the persistency of his suffering; at the end of the second week he could indeed stumble about with his two sticks, but still complained of great pain when he tried to walk. The prolonged presence of the visitor began at last to become a little trouble, even to the hospitable Manse, where strangers were entertained so kindly, but where there was but one maid-of-all work, with the occasional services, chiefly outdoors, of the minister's man—and an invalid of Ronald's robust character, whose presence necessitated better fare and gave a great deal of additional work, was a serious addition, both to the expenses and labours of the house. It would have been much against the traditions of the Manse to betray this in any way; but there was no doubt that the minister was a little more sharp in his speeches, and apt to throw a secret dart, in the disguise of a jest, at the guest whose convalescence was so prolonged. Lily rode down from Dalrugas every day to help to nurse the patient, that Helen might not have the whole burden of his helplessness on her shoulders: but Lily, too, became aware that, delightful though this freedom of meeting was, and the long hours of intercourse which were made legitimate as being a form of duty,

they were beginning to last too long and awaken uneasy thoughts. Helen, who was so tender to her at first, became a little wistful as the days went on. The gentle creature could think no harm, but perhaps it was her father's remarks which put it into her head that the two young people were making a convenience of her hospitality, and that all was not honest in the tale which had brought so unlooked-for a visitor under the shelter of her roof. And then the village, as was inevitable, made many remarks. "Bless me, but the young leddy at Dalrugas is an awfu' constant visitor, Miss Eelen. She comes just as if she was coming to her lessons every morning at the same hour." "She is the kindest heart in the world," said Helen. "You see this gentleman that sprained his foot is a friend of her uncle's, and she could not take him to Dalrugas, where there is nobody but servants; and she will not let me have all the trouble of him. A man, when he is ill, takes a great deal of attendance," said the minister's daughter, with a smile.

"Losh, I would just let him attend upon himsel'," said one.

"He should send for a sister, or somebody belonging to him," said another.

"Oh, not that," said Helen, "I could not put up a lady, there is but little room in the Manse—and with Miss Lily's help we can pull through."

"He should get an easy post-chaise from Aberdeen, there's plenty easy carriages to be got there nowadays, and go back to his ain folk. He's a son of Lumsden of Pontalloch they tell me—that's not so far but that he might get there in a day."

"I have no doubt he will do that as soon as he is well enough," said Helen; but all these remarks made her uneasy. Impossible for Scotch hospitality to give a hint, to intimate a thought, that the visitor had overstayed his welcome—and a man that had been hurt and was, perhaps, still suffering! "No, no," she said, shaking her head. But it troubled her gentle mind that Lily's visits should be so remarked, and it was strange—or was it only the village gossip that made her feel that it was strange? Lily perceived all this with an uneasy perception of new elements in the air.

"Ronald," she said one day when they were alone for a few minutes, "you could put your foot to the ground without hurting when you try. You will have to go away."

"Why should I go away?" he said with a laugh. "I am very comfortable. It is not luxury, but it does very well, when I see my Lily every day—"

"But oh," she cried, the colour coming to her cheeks, which had been growing pale these few days—"there are things of more consequence than Lily! The Manse people are not rich—"

"You need not tell me that," he said, looking round at the shabby furniture with a smile.

"But oh, Ronald, you don't see! They try to get nice things for you, they spend a great deal of trouble upon you, and they were glad at first—but it is now a fortnight."

"Lily, my love," he said quickly, "if you have ceased to care for this chance of meeting every day—if you want me to go away, of course I will go."

"Do you think it likely I should have ceased to

care?" she said, with tears in her eyes—"but we must think of other people too.

"Thinking of other people is generally a mistake. We all know how to take care of ourselves best—unless it is here and there someone like you, if there is anyone like my Lily. But, dear, I give very little trouble. What is there to do for me?—another bed to make, another knife and fork—or spoon, I should say, for we have broth, broth, and nothing but broth—and a little grouse now and then, sent to them by somebody, and therefore costing nothing."

"It is ungenerous to say that," Lily cried.

"My dearest, you will tell me what present I can send them when at last I am forced to tear myself away. A good present that will make up to them—a chest of tea, or a barrel of wine—or—but I don't want to go away, Lily; I would rather stay here and see you every day until I am forced to go back to my work."

"Oh, and so would I!" cried Lily; "but," she added with a sigh, "we must think of them. Mr. Blythe sits always, always in this room. It is the sunny room in the house, and he likes it best. But you see he has gone into his little study this day or two—which is very dreary—all because we are here."

"Very considerate of him," said Ronald with a laugh; "if that is a reason for going away, that they now leave us sometimes alone, I fear it will not move me, Lily; you must find a better than that."

"Oh, Ronald, will you not see?" cried Lily in distress. But what could a girl do? She could not put understanding into his eyes, nor consideration into his heart. He was willing to take advantage of these good

people, and the inducement was strong. She spoke against her own heart when she urged him to go away, and she was glad to be laughed out of her scruples, to be told of the "good present" that would make up for everything, of the gratitude that he would always feel, and his conviction that he gave very little trouble, and added next to nothing to their expenses. "Broth is not expensive," he said, "and the grouse, you know, Lily, the grouse!" Lily turned her head away, sick at heart. Oh, this was not how he should speak of the people who were so kind to him; but still, when she mounted Rory—now quite docile, and accustomed to trot every day into Kinloch-Rugas—in the afternoon, she could not but be glad to think that she might still come to-morrow, that there was at least another day.

One of these afternoons the parlour was full of people, under whose eyes Lily could not continue to sit by the side of the sofa and minister to the robust invalid's wants. There was the doctor, who gave him a little slap on his leg and said, "I congratulate ye on a perfect cure. You can get up and walk when you like, like the man in the Bible." And the school-master's wife who said, "Eh, what a good thing for you, Mr. Lumsden, and you been on your back so long." And there was the assistant and successor, Mr. Douglas, who was visibly anxious to get rid of all interlopers and speak a word to Helen. Oh, why did he not follow Helen when she went out to open the door for her visitors and leave Lily free to say once more to Ronald, but more energetically, "You must go."

"I was wanting to say, sir," said Mr. Douglas, "and I may add that I have Miss Eelen's opinion all on my

side, that I would like very much if you would say a parting word to the lads that are going out to Canada. We have taken a great deal of trouble with them, and a word from the minister—”

“You are the minister yourself, Douglas, they know more of you than they do of me.”

“Not so, Mr. Blythe. I am your assistant, and Miss Eelen, she is your daughter, and the best friend they ever had; but it's your blessing the callants want, and a word from you——”

“My blessing!” the old man said, with an uneasy laugh, “you're forgetting, my young man, that there's no sacerdotal pretensions in the auld Kirk.”

“You blessed them when they were christened, sir, and you blessed them and gave them the right hand of fellowship when they came to the Lord's table. I'm thinking nothing of sacerdotalism. I'm thinking of human nature. We have no bishops, but while we have ordained ministers, we must always have fathers in God.”

Mr. Blythe had never been of this new-fangled type of devotion. He had been an old Moderate, very shy of over much religion, and relying upon habit and tradition and a good deal of wholesome neglect. But the young man's earnestness, backed as it was by the serious light in his Helen's eyes, brought a colour to his old face. He was a little ashamed of the importance given to him, and half angry at the young people's high-flown notions. “I am not sure,” he said, “that I go with you, Douglas, nor with Eelen either, in your dealings with these lads. You just cultivate a kind of forced religion in them, that makes a fine show for a moment—it's the

seed that fell by the wayside and sprang up quickly, but had no root in itself."

"We can never tell that, sir," said the assistant; "it may help them when they have no ordinances to mind them of their duty. If they remember their Creator in the days of their youth—"

"Deed," said the old minister, "it is just as often as not to forget everything all the quicker when they come to man's estate. Solomon knew mainy things, but not the lads in a parish so near the Highlant line."

"Anyway, father, it will be kindly-like, and them going so far, far away."

"That is just it," said Mr. Blythe, "why should they go far, far away? Why couldn't ye let them jog on as their fathers did before them? I'm not an advocate for emigration. There are plenty of things the lads could do, without leaving their own country. Let them go to Glasgow, where there's work for everybody—or to the south. You think you can do everything with your arrangements and your exhortations, and looking after more than ye were ever asked to look after. I have never approved of all these meetings and things, and your classes and your lessons, and all the fyke you make about a few country callants. Let them alone to their fathers' advice and their mothers'. You may be sure the women will all warn them to keep off the drink—and much good it will do, whatever you may say, either them or you."

"But just a word of farewell, sir," pleaded the assistant, "we ask no more."

"And that is just a great deal too much, in present circumstances," cried the old minister. "Where would

ye have me speak to them—a dozen big country lads, like colts out of the stable? I cannot go out to the cold vestry at night, me that seldom leaves the house at all. And the dining-room is too small, and what other room have we free? Eelen, you know that as well as me. I cannot have them up in my bed-chamber; and the kitchen, with lasses in it, would be no place for such a ceremonial. No, no, we have no room, that is clear.”

“I hope, sir,” said Ronald from his sofa, “you are not saying this from consideration for me. I’d like nothing better than to see the boys and hear your address to them. It would be good, I am sure, and I am as much in need of good advice as any of them can be.”

“You are very considerate, Mr. Lumsden,” said the minister, after a pause. “It is a great thing to have an inmate that takes so much thought; but how can I tell that it would not be bad for you in your delicate state, with your nurses at your side all the day?”

“Delicate! I am not delicate!” cried Ronald, with a flush, “it is only, you know, this confounded foot.”

“Well, Douglas,” said the minister, “between Mr. Lumsden’s confounded foot and your confounded pertinacity, what am I to do? Since your patient, Eelen, is so kind and permits the use of our best parlour, have them in, have ben your callants. I must not be less gracious than my own guest,” the old man said.

Lily went away trembling after this scene, giving Ronald a beseeching glance—but she had no opportunity for a word. Next day, still tremulous, she returned to find him still there, a little defiant, not to be driven out. But a short time after, when she was

again preparing to go in to the "toun"—without any pleasant looks now from her household, or complaisance on the part of Dougal, who openly bemoaned his pony—the whole population of Dalrugas turned out to see the inn "geeg" once more climbing the brae. It contained Ronald and his portmanteau, speeding off to catch the coach, but incapable, as he said, in the hearing of everybody, of going away without thanking and saying farewell to his kind nurse. "Do you know what this young lady did for me?" he said to the little company, which included Rory, ready saddled, and the black pony harnessed, with the boy at his head. "She lifted me, I think, from where I lay, and put me on her own beast, like the Good Samaritan. She was more than the Good Samaritan to me. Look at her, like a fairy princess, and me a heavy lump, almost fainting, and with but one foot. That is what charity can do."

"Well, it was a wonderful thing," Katrin allowed, "but maist more than that was riding down ance errand to the town to take care of ye every day."

"Ah, that was for Miss Blythe's sake and not mine," he said. "May I come in, Miss Ramsay, to give you her message? Oh, Robina, I am glad to see you there; I can carry the last news to Sir Robert, and tell him how both mistress and maid are thriving on the moor."

It was all false, false, as false as words that were true enough in themselves could be. Lily ran up the spiral stair, while Beenie helped him to follow. The girl's heart was beating high with more sensations than she could discriminate. This was the parting, then, after so long a time together, the farewell, which was more dreadful than words could say—and yet she was

glad he was going. He was her own true love, and nobody was like him in the world, and yet Lily's mind revolted against every word he said.

"Why did you say all that?" she cried, breathless, when they were alone, "it was not wanted, surely, here."

"Necessary fibs," he said. "You are too particular, Lily—for me that am only carrying out my *rôle*. You see I am obeying you and going away at last."

"Oh, Ronald, it was not that I wanted you to go away."

"No, if I could have gone away, yet stayed all the same—but one can't do two opposite things at the same time. And, Lily, it must be good-bye now—for a little while; you will look out for me at the New Year."

"Do you call it just a little while to the New Year?" she cried, with the tears in her eyes.

"Three months, or a little more. I shall not come to Kinloch-Rugas; I'll find a lodging in some little farm; and in the meantime you will write to me, Lily, and I will write to you."

"Yes, Ronald," she said, giving him both her hands. Was this to be all? It was not for her to ask, it was for him to say.

"My bonnie Lily! If I could but carry you off, never to part more! But if nothing happens to release you, if Sir Robert does not relent, mind, my dearest, we must make up our minds and take it into our own hands. He is not to keep us apart for ever. You will let me know all that goes on, and whether those people downstairs have reported the matter; and I, for my part, will take my measures. When we meet again every-

thing will be clearer. And Lily, on your side, you will tell me everything, that we may see our way."

"There will be nothing to tell you, Ronald. There will be no report sent—Uncle Robert, I think, has forgotten my existence. There will be nothing, nothing to say—but that it is weary living alone here on the moor."

"Not more weary than my life in Edinburgh, pacing up and down the Parliament House, and looking out for work—but we'll see what is going to happen before the New Year; and I will send the present to those good Manse folk, and you will keep up with them, for they may be very useful friends. Is it time for me to go? Well, I will go if I must; and good-bye for the present, my darling, good-bye till the New Year."

Was it possible that he was gone, that it was all over, and Lily left again alone on the moor? She ran to Beenie's room, which was on the other side of the house, to watch the inn "geeg" as long as it was in sight. Nothing is ever said of what is intended to be said in a hasty last meeting like this. It was worse than no meeting at all, leaving all the ravelled ends of parting. And was it true that all was over, and Ronald gone, and nothing more to be done or said?

CHAPTER XVI.

THE dead calm into which Lily fell after all the agitations of this wonderful period was like death itself, she thought, after the tumult and commotion of a climax of life. Those days during which she had trotted down to the village on Rory, the mountain breezes in her face, and all the warmest emotions stirred in her breast, days full of anxiety and expectation, sometimes of more painful feelings, agitations of all kinds, but threaded through and through with the consciousness that for hours to come she would be with her lover, ministering to his wants, hearing him speak, going over and over with him, in the low-voiced talk (to which the old minister behind his newspaper gave, or was supposed to give, no heed), their own prospects and hopes, their plans for the future—all those things that are more engrossing and delightful to talk of than any other subjects in heaven or earth—were different from all the days that had passed over her before. Her youthful existence was like a dream, thrown back into the distance by the superior force and meaning of all that had happened since—both the loneliness and the society, the bitter time of self-experience and solitude, the joy of the reunion, the love so crossed and mingled, which had grown into greater intensity with every change. The little simple Lily who had “fallen in love,” as she thought, with Ronald Lumsden, as she

might have fallen in love with any one of a half-dozen of young men, was very, very different from the Lily who had been torn out of her natural life on his account, who had doubted him and found him wanting, who had been converted into the faith of an enthusiast in him, and conviction that it was she, and not he, that was in the wrong. Their stolen meetings on the moor, which had startled her back into the joy of existence, which had been so few, yet so sweet; their little meal together, which was like a high ceremony and sacrament of a deeper love and union; the tremendous excitement of the accident, and the agitated chapter of constant yet disturbed intercourse which followed (disturbed at last by a renewed creeping in of the old doubts, and anxiety to push him forward, to make him act, to make him think not always of himself, as he was so apt to do) all these things had formed an epoch in her life, behind which everything was childish and vague. She herself was not the same. It happens often in a woman's life that the change from youth and its lighter atmosphere of natural, simple things comes before the mind is developed, before the character is able to bear that wonderful transformation. Lily at first had been essentially in this condition. Her trial came to her before she had strength for it, and every new point of progress was marked, so to speak, with a new wound, quickly healed over, as became her youth, yet leaving a scar, as all internal wounds do. Even when the thrill of happiness had been in her young frame and mind it had been intensified by a thrill of pain: the pang of secrecy, the sharp sting of falsehood—falsehood which was abhorrent to Lily's nature. She had laughed as other girls laugh

at the stratagems of lovers, their devices to escape the observation of jealous parents, the evils that are said to be legitimate in love and war. Nobody is so severe as to judge harshly these aberrations from duty. Even the sternest parent smiles at them when they are not directed against himself. But when it came to inventing a story day by day; when it came to deceiving Katrin, with her sharp eyes, at one end, and Helen's unsuspecting soul at the other—then Lily could not bear the tangled web in which she had wound herself. She had to go on, it was too late to tell the truth now, she had said to herself, day by day, her heart aching from those thanks which Helen showered upon her for her kind attendance upon the unexpected guest. "If it had not been for you, Lily, what could I have done?" the minister's daughter had said, again and again; and Lily's heart had grown sick in the midst of her strained and painful happiness at Ronald's side.

Now this was over and another phase came. She had urged him to go, feeling the position untenable any longer, in a way which his robust self-confidence had not felt; but when suddenly he had taken the step she urged, Lily felt herself flung back upon herself, the words taken out of her mouth, and the meaning from her mind. All her little fabric of life tumbled down about her. Those habits which are formed so quickly, which a few days suffice to bind upon the soul like iron, dropped from her, and she felt as if the framework by which she had been sustained had broken down, and she could no longer hold herself erect. Her life seemed suddenly to have lost all its meaning—all its occupations. There was no sense in going on, no reason for its continuance

merely to eat meals, to take walks, to go to bed and to get up again. She looked behind her, to the immediate past, with a pang, and before her, to the immediate future, with a blank sense of vacancy, which was almost despair. When the "geeg" that carried him away was gone quite out of sight, Lily went slowly back to the drawing-room, and seated herself at the window where she had first seen him appearing across the moor. It had been then all ablaze with the heather, which now had died away into rustling bunches of dead flowers, all dried like husks upon the stalks, grey and dreary, like the dull evening of a glowing day. Her heart beat dull with the reverberation of all those convulsions that had gone through it. And now they were all over, like the glow of the heather—and what was before her? The winter creeping on, with its short days and long nights, storm and rain, when even Rory would not face the keen wind; solitude unbroken for weeks and months; and beyond that what was there to look forward to? Oh, if it had been but poverty—the little flat under the roofs, in a tall Edinburgh house, and to work her fingers to the bone! Poor Lily, who knew so little what working your fingers to the bone meant! who thought that would be blessedness beside one you loved, and in the world where you were born. So, no doubt, it would have been; but yet, in all probability, though she did not intend it so, it would have been Robina's fingers, not hers, that were worked to the bone.

I would not have the reader think that, translated into ordinary parlance, all this meant the vulgar fact that Lily was longing to be married, and would not accept the counsels of patience and wait, though she was only

twenty-two, and had so many, many years before her. Had Ronald been an eager lover, ready to brave fortune for her sake, and consider that, for love, the world were well lost, she would, no doubt, have taken the other side of the question, and preached patience to him, and borne her own part of the burden with a smile. But it is very different when it is the lover who is prudent, and when the girl, with an unsatisfied heart, has to wait and know that her happiness, her society, her life, are of less value to him than the fortune which he hopes, by patience, to secure along with her; also that she can do nothing to emancipate herself, nothing to escape from whatever painful circumstances may surround her, till he gives the word, which he shows no inclination to give, and which womanly pride and feeling forbid her even to suggest; also, and above all, that in his hesitation, in his prudence and delay, he is falling short of the ideal which every lover should fulfill or lose his place and power. This was the worst of all. Not only that Ronald was acting so, but that it was so far, far different from the manner in which Ronald, had he been the Ronald she thought, would have acted. This gave the bitterness under which Lily's heart sank. Again, she did not know what he meant to do, or if he meant to do anything, or if she were to remain as she was, perhaps for long years, consuming her heart in loneliness and vacancy, diversified by moments of clandestine meeting and unlovely happiness, bought by deceit. She could not again yield to that, she said to herself, with passionate tears. Though her heart were to break, she would not heal it at the cost of lies. It might not have given Lily many compunctions, perhaps, to have deceived her uncle—but to

deceive Helen, to deceive kind Katrin and Dougal, to give false accounts of the simplest circumstances, oh! no, no, never again, never again. She said this to herself, with passionate tears falling like rain, as she sat at her lonely window on many a dreary day, straining her eyes across the moor, where the rain so often fell to double the effect of those tears. Let them give each other up mutually, let them part and be done with it, if he chose; but to deceive everybody, and meet secretly, or meet openly upon the falsest of pretences, oh! no, no, Lily said to herself, never more.

But to say how these decisions melted, when, in the heart of the winter, there began to dawn the promise of the New Year, it is easy to imagine, and I do not need to say. Lily, it must be remembered, had no one but Ronald to represent to her happiness and life. She had never had many people to love—her father and mother had both died before she was old enough to know them. She had no aunt, though that is often an unsatisfactory relation, not even cousins whom she knew, which is strange to think of in Scotland—nobody to take her part or whom she could repose her heart upon, but Beenie, her maid, to whom Lily's concerns were her own sublimated, and who could only agree in and intensify Lily's own natural impulses and thoughts. Ronald was all she had, the only one who could help her, the sole deliverer possible, and opener to her of the gates of life. To be sure, she might have renounced him and so returned to her uncle, to be dragged about in a back seat of his chariot, if not at its wheels; though, indeed, even this was problematical, for Sir Robert was a selfish old man, who was, on the whole, very glad to have got rid of the

burden of a young woman to take about with him, and considered that she would do very well at the old tower, and might be quite content with such a quiet and comfortable home, a good cook (which Katrin was), a pony to ride upon, and the run of the moor. He had half forgotten her existence by this time, as Lily divined, and was absent "abroad" in that vague and wide world, of which stayers at home in Scotland knew so much less than everybody knows now. And, as the time approached for Ronald's return, Lily, in her longing for him, added to her longing for something, for someone, for society, emancipation, something that was life, began to forget all her old aches and troubles of mind; the doubts flew away, she remembered only that Ronald was coming, that he was coming, that the sun was about to shine again, that there was happiness in prospect, love, and company, and talk, and sympathy, and all that is good in youth and life. This time she must manage so that the deceit of old would be necessary no longer. Helen should know that the two who had met so often in the Manse parlour had come to love each other—what so natural, what so fitting, seeing they had spent so much time together under her own wing, and her own mild eyes? And Katrin and Dougal should be permitted to see what Lily was very sure they had divined already, that the poor gentleman whom Lily had nursed so faithfully was more to her than any other gentleman in the world. He should come to Dalrugas to see her, and be with her openly as her lover in the sight of all men. If Sir Robert heard of it, why then she must escape, she must fly, the pair must at last take it, as Ronald had said, into their own hands—and Lily did

not feel that she would be very sorry if this took place. At all events, now everything should be open and honest, clandestine no more.

It seemed as if he had come to the same decision when he arrived on the night, which was then called in Scotland, and is perhaps still to some extent, Hogmanay—why, I do not know, nor I believe does anyone—the last night of the year. He came in the early twilight, when the short, dark day was ending, and the long, cheerful evening about to begin. What a cheerful evening it was, the fire so bright, the candles twinkling, the curtains drawn, and from the kitchen the sound of the children singing, who had come out in a band all the way from the village to call upon Katrin:

“Get up, Gudewife, and shake your feathers,
And dinna think that we are beggars,
For we are bairns, come out to play,
Get up and gie's our Hogmanay.”

Lily was about to go down, flying down the spiral stairs, her heart beating loud with expectation, wondering breathlessly when he would come, how he would come, who alone could bring the Hogmanay cheer to her, and, in the meantime, ready, for pure excitement, and to keep herself still, to join the women in the kitchen, and fill the children's wallets with cakes—cakes *par excellence*, the oatmeal cakes to wit, which are still what is meant in Scotland by that word, baked thin and crisp, and fresh from the girdle, making a pleasant smell; and over and above these with shortbread, in fine, brown farls, the true New Year's dainty, and great pieces of bun, the Scotch bun which is something between a plum-pudding and the Pan Giallo of the Romans, a mass of

fruit held together by flour and water. Great provision of these delights was in the kitchen, which was all "redd up" and shining for the festival, with Katrin in her best cap, and Beenie in a silk gown and muslin apron, a resplendent figure. A band of "guisards" had accompanied the children, ready to enact some scene of the primitive drama of pre-historic tradition. Lily was hastening down to join this party, in a white dress which she too had put on in honour of the occasion. The kitchen was very noisy, full of these visitors, and nobody but she heard the summons at the big hall door. Lily hesitated for a moment, her heart giving a bound as loud as the knock: then she opened it. And there he stood—the hero and the centre of all!

"And, eh, what a lucky thing to come this night that Miss Lily may have her ploy too! You will just stop and eat your bit dinner with her, Maister Lumsden," Katrin cried.

"Will it be a ploy for Miss Lily? I should like to be sure of that."

"Eh, nae need to pit it in words," said Katrin, "look at her bonnie een; and reason good, seeing that she has never spoken to one of her own kind, and least of all to a young gentleman, since the day ye gaed away."

"I am staying at Tam, the shepherd's, on the other side of the moor," said Ronald.

"Losh me! at Tam, the shepherd's—for the shootin'?" she asked, in a tone of consternation.

"Well," he said, with a laugh, "you can judge, Katrin, for yourself."

"Ay, ay," she said, brightening all over. "I judge

for mysel', sir, and I see it's just the auld story. Tam the shepherd's an awfu' haverel—but his wife's an honest woman; and clean," she added, "as far as she kens. But you shall have a good dinner with Miss Lily, I promise you, for once in a way."

Lily only half listened, but she heard all that was said. And her heart danced to see his open look, and the words in which there was no pretence of shooting, or any reason, save the evident one, for his presence there. The excuses were all over, there was to be no more deception. Honestly he came as her lover, endeavouring to throw no dust in the eyes of her humble guardians. If they had been noble guardians, holding her fate in their hands, Lily could not have been more happy. They were not to be deceived. Openness and honesty were to be around her in the house which was her home. What was wanted but this to make her the happiest girl that ever piled shortbread into a child's wallet in honour of Hogmanay, and the New Year which was coming to-morrow? A new year, a new life, a different world! Katrin came up to her with half-affected horror and tender kindness, grasping her arm. "Eh, Miss Lily," she cried, "you'll just ruin the family, and we'll no have a single farl of shortbread left for our ain use; and the morn's the New Year! Ye are giving everything away. Na, na, we must mind oursels a wee. No more for you, my wee man. Miss Lily's just ower good to you. Run up the stairs, my bonnie leddy, for Beenie is setting the table, and you'll get your dinner, you and the gentleman, before the guisards begin."

"The gentleman!" Lily felt her countenance flame, as she laughed and turned away. "How kind you are,

Katrin," she said, "to provide me with company, too, me that never sees anybody."

"Am I no kind?" said Katrin in triumph, "and him for coming just at the right moment? I am awfu' pleased that you have a pairty of your ain to bring in a good New Year."

How strange, how delightful it was to sit down opposite to him at the table, to eat Katrin's excellent dinner, which, though it was almost impromptu, was so good—trout and game, the Highland luxuries, which were, indeed, almost daily bread on the edge of the moor, but not to Ronald, who amid all their happiness was man enough to like his dinner and praise it. "This is how we shall sit at our own table, and laugh at all our little troubles when they are over," he said.

"Oh, Ronald!" said Lily, with a little cloud in the midst of her joy. They might be little troubles to him, but not to her, all lonely in the wilderness.

"At all events, they will soon be over," he said. His eyes were bright and his tones assured—there was no longer any doubt in his look, which she examined in the moments when he was not looking at her, with an anxious criticism. "And tell me about the good folk at the Manse, and kind Miss Eelen and her assistant and successor. Is he to be her assistant too as well as her father's? I had a famous letter from the old gentleman about the wine I sent him. And Lily, I think that with very little trouble I will get him to do all we want, as soon as you can make up your mind to it. After all this time we must not have any more delay."

"To do all we want?" she said, looking up at him

with surprise. The dinner was over by this time, and they had left the table and were standing by the fire.

"Yes," he said, "what do we want but to belong to each other, Lily? You don't need grand gowns or all the world at your wedding. Oh, yes, I should have liked to see my Lily with all her friends about her, and none so sweet as herself. But since we cannot do that, why should we mind it—when the old minister here can make everything right in half an hour?"

"Ronald," she said, with a gasp, "you take away my breath!"

"Why?" he cried, "is not this what has been in our minds for ever so long? Have you not promised, however poor I was, in whatever straits—"

"Yes, yes, there is no question of that."

"And why, then, should it take away your breath? My bonnie Lily, is it not an old bargain now? We have waited and waited, but nothing has come of waiting. And Providence has put us in a quiet place, with nothing but friends round, and a good old minister, a kind old fellow, who likes a good glass of wine, and knows what he's drinking!" He laughed at this as he drew her closer towards him. "Lily, with everything in our favour, you will not put me off, and make a hesitation now?"

Oh, this was not quite the way, not the way she looked for! Yet she drew her breath hard, that breath which fluttered in spite of herself, and put both her hands in his. No, after so long waiting, why should she make a hesitation now? And then they went down to the kitchen together, arm in arm, Lily yielding to the delightful consciousness that there was no need for con-

cealment, to see the guisards act their primitive drama, and to bring in the New Year.

Oh, the New Year! which was coming in amid that rustic mirth, among those true, kind, humble friends to whom the young pair were as gods, in the glory of their love and youth. Lily trembled in her joy—what bride does not? What would it bring to them, that New Year?

CHAPTER XVII.

THIS New Year's Eve remained, amid all the experiences of Lily, a thing apart. It became painful to her to think of it in after times: but in the present it was like a completion and climax of life, still all in the visionary stage, yet so close on the verge of the real that she became herself like an instrument, thrilling to every touch, answering every air that blew, every word that was said, in each and all of which there were meanings hidden, of which none were aware but herself. There was the little dinner first, so carefully prepared by Katrin, so tenderly served by Beenie, the two young people sitting on either side of the table as if at their bridal banquet, while the sound of the festivities going on in the kitchen came up by times when the door was opened: a squeak of the fiddle, the sound of the stamping of the guisards, as they performed their little archaic drama, adding a franker note of laughter to the keen, supreme pleasure that reigned above. Beenie went and came, always bringing with her, along with every new dish, that little gust of laughter and voices from below,

to which she kept open half an ear, while with the other she attended to what her little mistress said.

"You maun come down, Miss Lily, to do them a grace: they a' say they'll no steer till they've seen the young leddy; and they're decent lads just come out to play, as the bairns say in their sang, neither beggars nor yet stravaigers, but lads from the town, to please ye with their bit performance; and I ken a' their mothers!" Beenie cried, with a little outburst of affectionate emotion.

When Lily went down accordingly, followed closely by her lover, the little primitive drama was repeated, with more stamping and shouting than ever: and then there was an endless reel, to the sound of the squeaking fiddle, in which Lily danced as long as she could hold out, and Beenie held out as it seemed for ever, wearing out all the lads.

"Eh! I was a grand dancer in my time," she admitted, when she had breath enough, while the fiddle squeaked on and on.

And then, as was right, Ronald said good-night as the rural band streamed away from the door. The curious group of the guisards, some of them in white shirts outside their garments, some in breastplates of tin, with an iron pot on their heads by way of helmet, "set him home" with much respectful kindness. "But I wuss ye were coming with us to the toun, for Tam the shepherd's is no a howff for a gentleman," they said.

"Any hole will do for me," said Ronald, in the exhilaration of the evening; and all the house came out of doors to speed the parting guests. The moon shone mistily over the long stretch of the moor, throwing up a

sinister gleam here and there from the deep cuttings, and flinging a veil as of gossamer over the great breadth of the country. The air was fresh, not over cold, "saft," as Dougal called it, with the suggestion of rain, and the sudden irruption of voices and steps into the supreme and brooding silence made the strangest effect in the middle of the night. Lily stood watching them as they marched away, Ronald so distinct from them all, as they streamed down under the shadow of the bank, to show again, chiefly by reason of their disguises, upon the road a little way down. Lily lingered until a speck of white in the distance was all that was visible. She was wrapped in a plaid which Ronald had put round her, drawing the soft green and chequered folds closely around her face, and as warm physically as she was at heart. Now he was himself; he had flung all prudences and fables to the wind; he had forgotten Sir Robert and his fortune, and every other common thing that could come between. Lily danced up the spiral staircase with a heart that sang still more than her lips did, as she "turned" the tune to which they had been dancing. No one can keep still to whom Tullochgorum is sung or played. She danced up the stairs, keeping time faster and faster to the mad melody—the essence unadulterated of reckless fun and drollery.

"Eh, my bonnie leddy!" Beenie cried, who had gone before with the candles; while Katrin stood looking after her, and Dougal locked and bolted the great hall door. Katrin shook her head a little: she was much experienced. "Eh, if he be but wordy of her!" she sighed.

"It's late, late at nicht, and the New Year well be-

gun," said Robina. "Eh, Miss Lily, you'll never forget this New Year?"

"Why should I forget it?" said Lily. "You had better wait till it is past before you say that. But maybe you are right after all, for there never was a Hogmanay like this; and to think that the morn will come, and that it will be no more like the other days than this has been! Beenie, did you ever hear that folk might be as feared for joy as for trouble? or is it only me, that am so timorsome, and cannot tell which it is going to be?"

"'Deed, and I've heard o' that, many's the day. It's just the common way, my bonnie dear. Many a bonnie lassie would fain flee to the ends of the earth the day before her bridal, that is just pleased enough when a's said and done. You mustna lose heart."

"I'm not losing heart," said Lily. "The day before my bridal! Is that what it is? I will just be happy to-night and never think of the morn: for when I begin to think it takes so many things to be satisfied, and I would like to be satisfied just for once, and take no thought."

Robina had a great deal to do in Lily's room that night. She kept moving to and fro, softly opening and shutting drawers and presses, laying away her mistress's things with a care that was scarcely necessary, and meant only restlessness and excitement and an incapacity to keep still. Long before she had done moving about the half-lighted room Lily was fast asleep, her excitement, though presumably greater, not being enough to keep sleep from the eyes which were dazzled with the sudden gleam of something so new and strange in

her life, as well as tired with an unusual vigil. Lily slept as soundly as a child till the clear, somewhat shrill daylight, touched with frost, shone upon her late in the wintry morning and called her up much more effectually than the wavering call of Beenie, who was hanging over her in the morning, as she had been at night, the first to meet her eyes.

"Eh, Miss Lily, what a grand sleep ye have had," Beenie cried. She had slept but little herself, her head full of the new situation and all the strange things that might be to come. The house in general had a sense of excitement breathing through it, not visible indeed in Dougal, who was, as usual, wrestling with the powny outside, but very apparent in Katrin, who went about her morning work with an extremely serious face, as if all the cares of the world were on her shoulders. Robina and she had various stolen moments of communication through the day, indeed, which testified to a degree of confidence between them, and a mutual pre-occupation.

"I'm no to say a word to her: but how am I to keep my tongue in my head, when Dauvit himself says that when he was musin' the fire burnt?"

"Losh!" cried Katrin, "if it was naething but haudin' your tongue! but what I've to think of is mair than that. Eh, I'm doing that for Miss Lily I would do for none of my kin, no, nor Dougal himself: and I wish I was just clean out of it, for I'm no fond of secrets: they are uncanny things."

"Eh, woman! ye wouldna betray them?" Beenie cried.

"Betray them? Am I a person to betray what's

trusted to me? but I wish there were nae secrets in this world. It's just aye cheating somebody. Ye canna be straichtforward, do what ye will, when ye've got other folk's secrets to keep, let alone them that are your ain."

"I'm no sae particular," said Beenie, with a little toss of her head, "and there will be no stress upon ye for long. It's just the ae step."

"I have my doubts," said Katrin, shaking her head.

"Ye have your doubts? and what doubts would ye have? It will a' be plain when ance it's done. There are nae mair secrets after that! It's just as I said; the ae step. Eh, me, I could have likit it far better in Sir Robert's grand house in Moray Place, and a' Edinburgh there, and the Principal himself to join their hands together, and my bonnie Miss Lily in the white satin, and the auld lady's grand necklace about her bonnie white neck. But we canna have everything our ain gate. The Manse parlour is just a' that can be desired in the circumstances we're noo in; and when it's done, it will just be done and naething more to say."

But Katrin still shook her head. She was a far-seeing woman. "I'm no just sure we will be out of it sae easy as that," she said.

This talk was not completed at once, but came in on various occasions, a few words here and there, as opportunity secured; and the two women, though both were excited and disturbed, did no doubt enjoy the *rôle* of conspirator, more or less, and felt that those secret consultations added a zest to life. Beenie, whose lips were sealed in the presence of her mistress, and Katrin, who had to maintain an aspect of absolute calm in the sight of Dougal, could not but feel a consciousness of

superiority, which consoled them for much that was uncomfortable. But, indeed, it was exasperatingly easy to deceive Dougal. He suspected nothing; secrets or mysteries had never come his way. Life meant to him his daily work, his daily parritch, the comfort of a crack now and then with his friends, a glass of toddy on an occasion, and the prevailing consciousness of being well done for at all times, with a clean hearthstone, and the parritch and the broth both well boiled and appetising, more than fell to the lot of ordinary men. If he had known even that Katrin was keeping a secret from him it is doubtful whether he would have been at all moved. He would have thought it some whigmaleerie of the wife's, and would have remained perfectly easy in his mind, in the conviction that she would tell him if it was anything he had to do with, and if not, wha was mind-ing? Nothing that she did or said roused his curiosity to any great degree. There had need to be something more serious than Dougal to account for the little contraction over Katrin's eyes.

This was, perhaps, more visible, however, after the conversation she had with Mr. Lumsden, on the afternoon of New Year's day. I cannot tell what he said to her, but there was something in it additional to what he had said on the evening before, when he had told her and Beenie what their parts were to be in the little drama for which he had not yet fully prepared the chief actor of all. Lily waited for him at the window with a heart that beat high in her breast on that frosty morning, when all the stretches of the moor were crisp and white, and every little rowan tree and bush of withered heather shone like something of frosted silver, across the

grey surface, tinged with a lower tone of whiteness. Lily saw him almost before he had come within the range of mortal vision, so far off that the road itself could not be seen, and only a faint speck that moved was distinguishable in the chill and frozen silence. The speck moved on, disappeared, came out again till it grew into absolute sight and knowledge, near enough to be recognised from the window and hastily met at the door with a sweep of flying feet and hands outstretched. "My bonnie Lily! the only flower that's not frosted," he said. The change that had taken place between them was made plain by this; that he came quite openly to the door, and that Lily flew to meet him. There was no longer any occasion for the supposed accident of meetings on the moor. How this change came about Lily did not stop to inquire. It was, and that was enough: and she was too happy in it even to wonder what could have been said or done underneath, to make the lover's appearance now a thing expected, and which it was unnecessary to attempt to conceal.

"It will perhaps be for to-morrow, and perhaps for the day after, I am not certain yet," Ronald said.

"What will perhaps be for to-morrow?" Lily cried, with a sudden flush on her cheek.

"We are not going to make any fuss about it, Lily. You promised me you would not desire that. It's very easy to be married in our country. If we were to call Dougal up and Katrin, and say we were man and wife, we would be married just as fast as by all the ministers in the world."

"Ronald!" cried Lily, growing pale.

"I am not suggesting such a thing. Do you think

that I would put a scorn on my bonnie Lily with a marriage like that? Not I! What I cannot bear is that you should be stinted of one thing you would like—though, for my part, the less the better, I say, and the most agreeable to me. But no; I am not that kind of man. I like the sanction of the Kirk. I like everything done decently and in order. That is why I say to-morrow or the next day; for I have not yet seen Mr. Blythe.”

“And is it to be so soon as that?” said Lily, with awe.

“My darling, what object have we in waiting? The Vacation is short enough anyway. We must not lose a day. You promised to be ready at a moment’s warning. Well, I’m giving you a day’s warning. If everything had been right it would have been you to fix the time, and all your fancies consulted: but we’re past that, Lily. You know you put yourself into my hands to have it done as soon as was possible.”

“Did I?” said Lily, confused; and then she added, “I know. I am not one to make a trouble. It is best to be done when we can—and as soon as we can—and end this dreary life.”

“That is what I knew you would say. No certainty, no ground to stand on, and not knowing what might happen at any moment. No, Lily, it is no time for scruples now.”

“Still,” said Lily, “I would have liked to have heard all your plans and what we are to do. It is fine planning; it is aye a pleasure, even when it comes to nothing. And now, when it must come to something—”

“That’s the difference I suppose between man and woman,” said Ronald, with a laugh. “I have no thought

of anything but one thing. I care nothing about plans. You that are all made up of imagination, you shoot past and begin again. But me: I think only of getting my Lily, of having her for my own. I have neither plots nor plans in my head."

"It is a good thing then that women think of them, for we can't do without them," Lily said. But she was soothed and pleased that her bridegroom should have no thought but for herself. Perhaps this was what was most fit for the man. The woman had the outset to think of, the new house to live in, and everything else that was involved. The reverse thought gives pleasure in other circumstances. There is no consistency in the reasonings of this period of life.

"Let us go out now," said Ronald, "the frost is hard; and it's fine dry walking; we'll get a turn round the moor, and then I will be off to the "toun" to see the minister, and to-night I'll come back and tell you all about it. Wrap up well, for it's cold, but so bright that it does the heart good. But it is the day itself, and because it is the day, that does the heart most good," he said, once more wrapping Lily up, close round her pretty throat, with the soft, voluminous folds of the plaid. The two faces so close together, the light in his eyes, the contagious happiness in his face, took every shadow from Lily's heart. There had been no shadows, only a faint sort of floating gossamer, which had no meaning, and now it melted all away.

The ramble round the moor filled all the bright noon of the wintry day. It was not possible to wander among the ling bushes, or by the soft, meandering lines of turf.

All was crisp with the curling whiteness of the frost, except here and there where a prominent point had been melted and darkened by the sun. They went along the road, which crackled under their feet, with small ice crystals in every fissure. The mountains stood blue in a faint haze that seemed to breathe into the still air, and the moor stretched white, like a piece of crisp embroidery under the shining of the light. How wintry the air was, and how exhilarating, tightening the nerves and stimulating every force! Towards the north the sky was heavy and spoke of snow, but there were soft breaks of blue and lines of yellow light in the brighter quarter. They walked now quickly as they faced the wind, now slowly as they turned their backs upon it, and, wrapped in their soft plaids, felt the soft glow and warmth mount to their youthful cheeks. I doubt if any summer ramble, in the sweetest air and among the flowers, would have been more full of pleasure. They talked to each other incessantly, but perhaps not very much that would bear repeating; yet there was a little veiled conflict certainly going on all the time, scarcely conscious, hidden in innocent questions and suggestions, in innocent seeming evasions. Lily wanted to ask so much, but half feared to put a direct question lest it should bring out a jarring note, while he wanted to keep every question at arm's length, but did not dare to do so lest it should excite suspicion. There was an occasional flash of the rapiers, soon covered up in the softest tones and touches, but still they kept their distinct parts: she anxious to see a little beyond, he eager to keep her within the limits of the day. He parried all her thrusts with this pretence, that his thoughts could not stray beyond to-morrow.

"Sufficient unto the day is the happiness thereof," he said.

Then they went in and had their mid-day meal together, once more attended by Beenie, with a world of meaning in every glance. "They are just twa bonnie doos crooning on a branch," she said to Katrin as she came downstairs for another dish. "Doos!" cried Katrin, "they have a very good will to their meat, that's a' that I can say." "They are like twa bonnie squirrels in a wood," cried Beenie, at her next dive into the kitchen, "givin' aye a look the one to the ither." "Squirrels, my certy! but I wouldna like to gether the nits for them a' the year through," said Katrin. But when Beenie came back for the pudding, and declared that "they were like twa bonnie fishes side by side in the burn, the ane mair silvery and golden than the other," Katrin's amazement and ridicule, and the excitement underneath, found vent in a shriek, which brought Dougal hurrying in from the barn. "Losh, woman! are ye brunt in the fire, or have ye spilt the boiling pot upon ye, or what have ye done?" "I'll gie you the boiling pot yourself, and a dish-clout to pin to your tail, and that will learn ye to ask fule questions," Katrin said.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RONALD walked into Kinloch-Rugas after the plentiful luncheon upon which Katrin had made so many remarks. His head was buzzing and his bosom thrilling with the excitement natural at that period of existence. He loved Lily—as well as he was capable of loving—with all the mingled sentiment and passion, the emotions high and low, the very human and half divine which are involved in that condition of mind. He was a healthy, vigorous, and in no way vicious young man. If he had not the highest ideal, he had not at all the lowered standard of a man whose mind has been debased by evil communications. He was, in his way, a true lover, at the climax of life which is attained by a bridegroom. His thoughts were set to a kind of rhythmic measure of “Lily, Lily,” as he walked swiftly and strongly down the long road towards the village. If his mind had been laid bare by a touch of the angel’s spear, it would not, I fear, have satisfied Lily, nor anyone who loved her: but it sufficiently satisfied himself. He did not want to look beyond the next step which, he had convinced himself, was the right step to take: what was to follow was, he tried to assure himself, in the providence of God; or, if that was too serious (but Ronald was a serious man, willingly conceding to God the right to influence human affairs) it was open to all developments—chances even, if you like to say so—of natural events. Who could say

what would happen on the morrow?—in the meantime, a reasonable man's concern was with the events of the day. And though he was not a highly-strung person by nature, he was to-day all lyrical, and thrilling with the emotions of a bridegroom. He was not unworthy of the position. His very foot acknowledged that thrill, and struck the ground in measure, as if the iron strings of frost had been those of a harp. The passer-by, plodding along with head down and nose half sheltered from the cutting wind, took that member half out of the folds of his plaid to see what it was that was so bye-ordinary in the man he met. He did not sound like a common man going into the town on common business, nor look like it when the spectator turned to breathe the softer way of the wind for a moment and look after the stranger. Neither did Ronald feel like anyone else in that wintry afternoon. He was a bridegroom, and the thrill of it was in all his veins.

It was nearly dark when he came in sight of the lights—chiefly twinkling lights in windows, for there was no gas as yet to illuminate every little place as we have it now. In the Manse, with its larger windows, it was still light enough, and the soft yellow and pink of the frosty evening sky lent colour, as well as light, to the calm of the parlour, facing towards the west, where Mr. Blythe sat alone. It was the minister's musing time. Sometimes he had a doze; sometimes he sat by the fire, but with his chair turned to the sunset, and indulged in his own thoughts—these were confessedly, in many cases, his old stories, over which he would go from time to time, with a choke of a laugh in the stillness over this and that: perhaps there were moments in which his

musings were more solemn: but of these history bears no record. The Manse parlour had no feature of beauty. It was a very humdrum room; but to the minister it was the abode of comfort and peace. He wanted nothing more than was to be found within its four walls—life was quite bounded to him by these walls, and I think he had no wish for any future that went beyond them. His *Scotsman*, which lasted him from one day to another, till the next (bi-weekly) number came in—his books, chiefly volumes of old history, or reminiscences, sometimes a Scots (occasionally printed Scott's) novel; but that was a rare treat, and not to be calculated upon. A bout of story-telling now and then when another clerical brother, or old elder whose memory stretched back to those cheerful, jovial, legendary days, where all the stories come from; these filled up existence happily enough for the old minister. His work was over, and I fear that perhaps he had never put very much of his heart into that—and he had his daughter to serve him “hand and foot,” as the maids said. He did not need even to take the trouble of finding his spectacles (which, like most other people, he was always losing) for himself. “Eelen, where’s my specs?” he said, without moving. Such was this old Scotch Presbyter and sybarite—and though a paradise of black haircloth and mahogany does not much commend itself to us nowadays, I think Mr. Blythe would gladly have compounded for the deprivation of pearly gates and golden streets, could he have secured the permanence of this.

He was very glad to see Ronald, notwithstanding that he had become very anxious to get rid of him during his stay at the Manse. A visitor of any kind

was a godsend in the middle of winter, and at this time of the year: and especially a visitor from Edinburgh, with news to tell, and perhaps a fresh story or two of the humours of the courts and the jokes of the judges—things that did not get even in *The Scotsman*. “And what’s a’ your news, Mr. Lumsden?” he said eagerly. Ronald, who had had many opportunities of understanding the old minister, had come provided with a scrap or two piquant enough to please him—and what with the jokes, and what with the politics, made a very good impression in the first half-hour of his visit. Then came the turn of more personal things.

“Yon was a fine glass of wine, Mr. Lumsden,” said the minister, with a slight smack of his lips.

“I am very glad you liked it, sir: it was chosen by one of my friends who is learned in such matters. I would not trust it to a poor judge like myself.”

“Better for you, Mr. Lumsden, better for you at your age not to be too good a judge. Look not upon the wine when it is red, says the prophet, which is just when it’s best, many persons think. I am strongly of his opinion when your blood’s hot in your veins, like the most of you young lads: but when a man begins to go down the hill, and when he’s well exercised in moderation, and to use without abusing, then a grand joram of wine like yon makes glad the heart—as is to be found in one rather mysterious scripture—of God and man.”

“I hoped it would give you a charitable thought—of one that was rather a *sorner*, as I remember you said, upon your hospitality.”

“That was never meant—that was never meant,” said the minister, waving his large flabby hands. Ronald

had risen from his seat and was now standing by the fire, leaning his arm on the mantelpiece. The slow twilight was waning, and though the daffodil sky still shone in the window, the fire had begun to tell, especially in the shadow of the half-lit room.

"You see, sir," said Ronald, with a leap of his heart into his throat, and of the voice which accompanied it, coming forth with sudden energy—"there was more in that than met the eye."

"Aye, do ye say so?" said Mr. Blythe, also with a quickened throb of curiosity in his voice.

"Miss Ramsay and I—had met in Edinburgh," said Ronald, clearing his throat. "We had seen—a great deal of each other. We had, in short—"

"I always said it—I always said it," said the minister. "I told Eelen the very first night. I've seen much in my day. 'These two are troth-plighted,' I said to my daughter, before ye had been in my house a single night."

"I thought it was vain to attempt deceiving your clever eyes," said Ronald. "I told Lily so—but ladies, you know, are never so sure—they think they can conceal things."

"Thrust their heads into the sand like the ostriches, silly things, and think nobody can see them!" said the minister. "I know them well—that's just what they all do."

"Well, so it was, at least," said Ronald. "You will not, perhaps, wonder now that I stayed as long as I could—out-staying my welcome, I fear, and wearing out even your hospitality; but it was a question of seeing Lily—without exciting any suspicion—in a natural, easy way."

"I will not say much about that last; for it was more than suspicion on my part."

"Ah, but everybody is not like you—neither your experience nor your powers of observation are common," said Ronald. He paused a moment, to let this compliment sink in, and then resumed. "Mr. Blythe, I will admit to you that Sir Robert is not content, and that—in short, Lily was banished here, to take her away from me."

"I cannot think it a great banishment to be sent to Dalrugus, which is a fine house in its way, though maybe old-fashioned—and servants to be at her call night and day," said the minister, "but you may easily see it from another point of view—proceed, proceed," he added, with again a wave of his hand.

"Well, sir, I can but repeat—Sir Robert does not think me rich enough for his niece. She is his only kin; he would like her to marry a rich man; he would sacrifice her, my bonnie Lily, to an old man with a yellow face and bags of money."

"Well, well, that's no so unnatural as you think. I would like my Eelen to have a warm down-sitting if I could help her to it—to go no further than myself."

"I understand that, sir; my Lily is worthy of a prince, if there could be a prince that loved her as well as I do. But it is me she has chosen and nobody else—and she is not one to change, if she were shut up in Dalrugus Tower all her life."

"Eh, I would not lippen to that," said the minister, "she is but a young thing. Keep you out of the gate, and let her neither hear from you nor see you, and her bit heart, at that age, will come round."

"Thank you for the warning, sir," said Ronald, with a laugh that was forced and uncomfortable, "that's what Sir Robert thought, I suppose. But you may believe there is no pleasure to me in thinking so. And besides, it would never happen with Lily, for Lily is true as steel." He paused for a moment, with a little access of feeling. It remained to be seen whether he was true as steel himself—and perhaps he was not quite assured on that point; yet he was capable, so far, of understanding the matter that he was sure of it in Lily, and the conviction expanded his breast with pride and pleasure. He paused with natural sentiment, and partly with the quickening of his breath, to take the full good of that sensation! and then he resumed.

"I am not rich, you will easily understand—we are a lot of sons at home, and my share will not be great. But I have a good profession, and in a few years, so far as I can see, I may be doing with the best. As far as family is concerned, there can be no question between any Ramsay and my name."

The minister waved his hand soothingly over this contention. It was not to be gainsaid, nor was any comparison of races to be attempted. He said, "In that case, my young friend, if it's but a few years to wait, and you will be doing so well—and both young, with plenty of time before ye, so far as I can see, ye can well afford to wait."

"I might afford to wait, that am kept to my work, and little enough time to think—but Lily, Mr. Blythe. Here is Lily alone in the wilderness, as she says. I'm forbidden to see her, forbidden to write to her."

"Restrictions which ye have broken in both cases."

"Yes," cried Ronald, "how could we let ourselves be separated—how could I leave her to languish alone? I tried as long as I could: I did not write to her: I did not come near her: but flesh and blood could not bear it. And then when I saw how glad she was to see me, and how her bonnie countenance changed—" Here he nearly broke down, his voice trembled, so genuine and true was his feeling. "We cannot do it," he said, faintly, "and that's all that's to be said. Mr. Blythe, you are the minister, you have the power in your hands—"

"Eh, man! but I'm only the auld minister nowadays," cried the old gentleman, with a sudden outburst of natural bitterness to which he very seldom gave vent. He was delighted to have nothing to do, but did not love his supplanter any more on that account. "Ye must ask nothing from me; go your ways to my assistant and successor, he is your man."

"I will go to nobody but you," cried Ronald, with all the fervour of a temptation resisted. "Mr. Blythe, will you marry Lily to me?"

Mr. Blythe made a long pause. "If ye are rightly cried in the kirk, I have no choice but to marry ye," he said.

"But I want it done at once, and very private—without any crying in the kirk."

"That would be very irregular, Mr. Lumsden."

"I know it would; but not so irregular as calling up Beenie, and Dougal, and Katrin, and saying before them, 'This is my wife.'"

"No," said the minister, "not just so bad as that; but very irregular. Do ye know, young man, I would

be subject to censure by the Presbytery, and I canna tell what pains and penalties? And why should I do such a thing, to save you a month or two, or a year or two's waiting?—that is nothing, nothing at your age.”

“It is a great deal when people are in our circumstances,” cried Ronald. “Lily so lonely, not a creature near her, no pleasure in her life—no certainty about anything; for Sir Robert might hear I had been seen about, and might just sweep her away—abroad, to the ends of the earth. You say she would forget, but she does not want to forget, nor do I, you may be sure—whereas, if you will just do this for us, you will make us both sure of each other for ever, and I can never be taken from her, nor she from me.”

“Young man,” said the minister impressively, “I got my kirk from the Ramsays; they’re patrons o’ this parish, and I was a young man with little influence. I was tutor to Mr. James, but I had little chance of anything grander than a parish school, where I might have just flourished as a stickit minister all my days—and it was the Ramsays that made me a placed minister, and set me above them a’; that was the old laird before Sir Robert’s days. But Sir Robert has been very ceevil the times he has been here. He has asked me whiles to my dinner, and other whiles he has sent me just as many grouse and paitricks as I could set my face to. Would it be a just return, think ye, to marry away his bonnie niece to a landless lad as ye confess ye are, with nothing but fees at the best, and not too many of them coming in?”

“Mr. Blythe,” cried Ronald, “if it was Mr. James you were tutor to, it is to Mr. James you owe all this—

and Mr. James, had he been living, would never have gone against the happiness of his only child."

"Eh! but who can tell that?" cried the minister, "little was he thinking of that or of any kind of child. He was a young fellow, maybe as heedless, maybe more than ye are yourself. Na, there was no thought, neither of wife nor bairn in his head."

"But," cried Ronald, "you must feel you have a double duty to one that is his child and his only one, little as he knew of it at the time."

"A double duty! and what is that?" said the minister, shaking his head—"the duty to keep her from any rash step, puir young unfriended thing—or to let her work out her silly will which, maybe, in a year's time she would rather have put her hand in the fire than have done."

"You give a bonnie character of me," Ronald said, with a harsh laugh.

"I am giving no character of you. I am thinking nothing of you. I am thinking of the bit lassie. It is her I am bound to protect, both for her father's sake and her own. Most marriages that are made in haste are, as the proverb says, repented of at leisure. She might be heart grieved at me that helped her to her will to-day, when she knows more of life and what it means. Na, na, my young friend, take you your time and wait. Waiting is aye a salutary process. It brings out many a hidden virtue—it consolidates the character—and if you are diligent in your business, it brings ye your reward: which ye enjoy more than if you had snatched it before your time."

"I tell you, minister," cried Ronald, "that we can-

not wait—that it's a matter of life and death to us, both to Lily and me."

"What is that you are saying? I am hoping there is no meaning in it, but only words," the old man said sharply, in an altered tone.

The room had grown almost quite dark, the daffodil colour had all faded away, and the heavy curtain of the coming snow was stretching over the last faint streak of light. The fire was smouldering and added little to the room, which lay in a ruddy dark, warmed rather than lighted up. Ronald stood with his elbow on the mantelpiece close to the old minister, whose face had been suddenly raised towards him with an expression of keen command and alarm. And who can tell what devil had stolen in with the dark to put words of shame into the mouth of the young man who had come down the frosty moorland road like a song of joy and youth? It was rapid as a dart. He stooped down and said something in the old minister's ear.

The shameful lie! the shameful, shameful lie! The temptation, the fall, was so instantaneous, that Ronald himself was scarcely conscious of it, or of what he had done in his haste. The old gentleman uttered into the darkness a sort of moan. And then he spoke briefly and sharply, with a keen tone of scorn in his words, which stung his companion even through the confusion of the time.

"If that's so, ye're a disgraceful blackguard; but it's not my part to speak. Be here at this house the morn, with her and your witnesses—I insist upon the witnesses, two of them, to sign the lines. I will send Eelen out of the way. Come before it's dark as ye came to-day—I

am always alone at this hour. That's enough, man, I hope. What are you wanting more?"

"I only want to say that you judge me very hastily, Mr. Blythe."

"It's a case in which the least said is soonest mended," said the minister. "To-morrow—just before the darkening—and, thank the Lord, there need not be another word said between you and me."

CHAPTER XIX.

RONALD started back on his way to Dalrugus in the beginning of the wintry night in a condition very different from that in which he came. His head was dazed and swimming; something had happened to him; he had said words such as he had never contemplated saying—words which, did Lily ever know or suspect them, would, he knew, open such a gulf between them as nothing could ever bridge over. He was in a hundred minds to turn back, to confess his sin before he had passed the last house in the village. We do not call that a temptation when we are impelled to do right, but it is the same thing, only the temptations to do right are somehow less potent than those to do wrong. He was torn by a strong impulse to go back and remedy what he had done: the temptation to commit that fault had been momentary, but overwhelming—the temptation to go back and confess was continuous, but evidently feeble, for he went straight on through all its tuggings, and did not walk more slowly. But yet it would have done him much good and probably no harm had he

done so: the minister would have forgiven a fault so soon repented of: he would probably, in the natural feeling towards a penitent sinner, have acceded to his wishes all the same. These thoughts went through Ronald's head without ever stopping his steady and quick walk into the dark. He repented, if that had been enough, in sackcloth and ashes—he was so deeply ashamed of what he had done that he felt his countenance flame in the darkness where nobody could by any possibility see. But he did not turn back. And presently by repetition the impulse weakened a little, his brain cleared and the world became steady once again. The thing was done; it could not be undone. There was no possibility that Lily should ever hear of it; nobody would ever know of it but old Blythe and himself: and old Blythe would die. It would be a recollection which, in the depth of the night, in moments of solitude, or when awakened by a sudden touch of the past, would go on stinging him like a serpent all the days of his life: but it would be otherwise innocuous. Lily would never hear of it—that was the great thing; there was no chance that she could ever hear. The old minister's lips were sealed. It would be contrary to every rule of honour if he were to betray what had been said to him. Ronald said to himself that he must accept the stinging of that recollection, which he would never get rid of all his life, as his punishment: but no one else would suffer, Lily least of all.

These feelings were hot and strong in his mind as he set out, but a walk of four miles against a cold wind, and with the snow threatening to come down every moment, is a very good thing for dispersing troublous

thoughts. They gradually blew away as he went on, and the bridegroom's state of triumph and rapture came back—dimly at first, and as if he dared not indulge it, but gaining strength every moment, until, before he reached Dalrugas, from the first moment when he saw his love's light in her window shining far over the moor, it came back in full force, driving everything else away. He saw first the little star of light hanging midway between earth and sky, and then the shape of the window, and then Lily's figure or shadow coming from time to time to look out; and no lover's heart could have risen higher or beat more warmly. He entirely forgot how he had wronged her in the glory of having her, of knowing her to be there waiting for him, and that she would be his wife to-morrow. She came to the top of the stairs to meet him, while he rushed up three steps at a time, rubbing against the narrow spiral of the stair, with such passion and force of feeling as the best man in the world could not have surpassed. One does not require, it is evident, to be the best man in the world, or even a good man at all, to love truly and fervently, and with all the force of one's being. One might say that it was selfishness on Ronald's part to appropriate at any cost the girl he loved: but the fact remained—a fact far deeper than any explanation—that he did love her as deeply, as warmly, as sincerely as any man could. Their meeting was a moment of joy to both—like a poem, like a song: their hearts beat as high as if it had been a first meeting after years of absence, and yet it would have been less complete had they been parted for more than the two or three hours, which was its real period. I need not go any further into this record. It did not

matter what they said—words are of little account at such moments. It is only to note that a man who had just told a disgraceful lie, and put upon his bride a stigma of the most false and cruel kind, and whose mind was already shaping thoughts which were destined to work her woe, was, at the moment when he met her with the news that their marriage was to take place next day, as much, as tenderly in love with her as heart could desire. The problem is one which I have no power to explain.

Next day being still one of the Daft Days, bright with the reflection of the New Year, and the day of the weekly market in Kinloch-Rugas, Katrin announced early her intention of going in to the toun in the course of the day, an expedition which Beenie, with much modesty and reference to Miss Lily, proposed to share. "I havena been in the toun—no to say in the toun, ither than at the kirk, which is a different thing—since I came to Dalrugas. I'll maybe get ye a fairing, laddie, for the sake of the New Year—"

"If he gangs very canny with the powny, and tak's care of a' our bundles," Katrin said.

"And me, I'm to be left my lane, to keep the hoose," said Dougal, "like Joan Tamson's man."

"Weel," said Katrin, "ye're in there mony a day, and me at hame; it would be a funny thing if I couldna gang to the market once at the New Year."

"I'm saying nothing against you and your market. And here's Miss Lily away to her tea at the Manse, and maun have Rory no less to drive her in the geeg with that lad from Edinburgh. I wish there was less of that lad from Edinburgh; he's nae ways agreeable to me."

"Losh, man; it's no you he's running after," cried Katrin, "nor me neither. But he's a fine lad, for all that."

"Fine or foul, I would like to see the back of him," said Dougal: and the women in their guilty consciences trembled. They had both been brought to Ronald's side. Both of them had a soft heart for true love, and the fact of stealing a march upon Sir Robert was as pleasant to Katrin as if she had been ten times his housekeeper. The house was full of subdued excitement, hidden words exchanged between the women on the stairs and in dark corners, as if they were conspirators or lovers. "Has he any suspicion, do you think?" Beenie whispered in Katrin's ear. "Him!" cried Katrin; "if it was put under his nose in black and white, he would bring it to me to spell it out till him." "Eh, but sometimes these simple folks discern a thing when others that are wiser see nothing." "Wha said my man was simple? There's no a simple bit about him: but he knows I'm a woman to be trusted, and he'll no gang a step without Katrin." It was not, perhaps, a moment when an anxious inquirer could feel this trust justified. "Eh, Katrin," cried Robina, "tell me just what's the worst that could happen to them if it was found out." "The worst is just that he would have to take his bride away, Beenie." "Eh! she would no be minding! That's just what she wants most." "And lose her uncle's siller," Katrin added, with a deeper gravity of tone. "That wouldna trouble her either," said Beenie, shaking her head as over a weakness of her mistress, which she could not deny. "But I am feared, feared," said Katrin, solemnly, with that repetition which

makes an utterance emphatic, "that it would be a sore trouble to him." "Any way, it's a' settled now, and we'll have to stick to them," said Beenie, doubtfully. "Oh, I'll stick to them—as long as I can stand," Katrin said, with vigour: and this was the last word.

It was clear enough that something was going to take place at the tower of Dalrugus on that Thursday: but this was sufficiently accounted for by the fact that Katrin was going to the market, a thing that did not happen above twice or thrice a year. There were a great many arrangements to make, and the black powny had begun his toilet, and the little cart had been scrubbed and brushed before the sun was well up in the sky—to receive the two substantial forms which, on their side, were arrayed in their best gowns before the early dinner to which they sat down, each with her heart in her mouth in all the excitement of the ripe conspiracy. Only an hour or two now, and the signal would be given, the cord would be pulled, and the great scene would open upon them. "Will you and me ever forget this day, Katrin?" Beenie gasped, unable to control herself. Katrin gave her 'a push with her shoulder, and took her own place soberly at the board to dispense the dinner as usual. "There's an awfu' fine piece of beef in the pot," she said; "ower good for the like of us: but it'll mind ye, Dougal, of the day ye keepit the house, and I gaed to the toun."

"It's no the first day I've keepit the house, and you been the one to gang to the toun."

"No: maybe ye've done it four times since you and me were marriet. If ye ever got better broth than thae broth, it's no me that made them. They're that well

boiled they just melt in your mouth with goodness, with a piece of meat in them fit for the laird's table. Have ye taken up some of my broth, Beenie, to the young lady and her friend up the stair?"

"You're no taking much of them yourself," said Dougal, "nor Beenie either. Bless the women, your heads are just turned with the grand ploy o' going to the market. Me, I gang to the market and say nae-thing about it, nor ever lose a bite of a bannock on that account. But you're queer creatures—no to be faddomed by man. Are ye going to spend a lot o' siller that ye're in siccan a state? Beenie, now, she'll be wanting a new gown."

"If ye think that I, that am used to a' the grand shops in Edinburgh, would buy a gown at Kinloch-Rugas!—"

"Oh, when ye can get nae better, it's aye grand to tak' what ye can get," said Dougal. "As for Katrin, I canna tell what's come over her. Her hand's shakin'—"

"My hand's no shakin'!" cried Katrin vehemently. "I'm just as steady as any person. But I've been awfu' busy this mornin' putting everything in order, and I've very little appetite. I'm no a great eater at any time."

"Nor me," said Beenie, "and I'm tired too. I've just been turning over and over Miss Lily's things."

"Ye had very little to do," said Katrin, resenting the adoption of her own argument. "Miss Lily's things could easy wait. Sup up your broth, and dinna keep us all waiting. Sandy, here's a grand slice for you. It's seldom you've tasted the like of that. And as soon as you're done, laddie, hurry and put in the pony, for

we must have a good sight o' the market, Beenie and me, before it gets dark."

Dougal came out to the door to see them off, with his bonnet hanging upon the side of his head by a hair. He felt the presence of something in the atmosphere for which he could not account. What was it? It was some "ploy" among the women, probably not worth a man's trouble to inquire into. And, as soon as they were off, he had Rory to put in, and await the pleasure of "thae twa" upstairs. He could not refuse Lily anything, nor indeed had he any right to refuse to Sir Robert's niece the use of Rory, on whom she had already ridden about so often. But the lad from Edinburgh was a trial to Dougal. He had an uneasy feeling that it would not please his master to hear of this visitor, and that a strange man about the house was not to be desired. "If it had but been a lassie," he said: in that case he would have been glad that Miss Lily had some company to amuse her; but a gentleman, and a gentleman, too, that was a stranger, not even of the same county—a lawyer lad from the Parliament House. He did not willingly trust a long-leggit loon like that to drive Rory. He was mair fit to carry Rory than Rory to carry him, so that Dougal's countenance was entirely overcast.

There had been some snow in the morning, a sprinkling just enough to cover the ground more softly and deeply than the hoar frost, but that was but preliminary, there was a great deal more to come. Dougal stood when the pony was ready, pushing his cap from side to side and staring at the sky. "Ye'll do weel to bide but very short time, Miss Lily," he said; "the tea

at the Manse is, maybe, very good; but the snow will be coming down in handfu's before you get hame."

"We shall not stay long, Dougal, I promise you," Lily said. There was a tremble in her voice as there had been in Katrin's, and in Robina's. "The women are all clean gyte," Dougal said to himself. He watched them go away, criticising bitterly the pose of Ronald as he drove. "A man with thae long legs has no mortal need for a pony," he said, "they're just half a yard longer than they ought to be. I'm about the figure of a man, or just a thought too tall, for driving a sensitive beast like our Rory. Puir beast, but he has come to base uses," said Dougal. I don't know where he had picked up this phrase, but he was pleased with it, and repeated it, chuckling to himself.

That evening, just before the darkening, when once more the sunset sky was flushed with all kinds of colour, and shone in graduated tints of rose-pink, darkening to crimson, and blue melting into green, through the Manse window, one homely figure after another stole into the Manse parlour. Katrin had brought the minister a dozen of her own fresh eggs, and what could he do less than call her in and say, "How is a' with ye," at New Year's time, when everybody has a word of good wishes to say? "And this is Robina," he added, with a touch of reserve and severity in his tone. Beenie could not understand how to her—always so regular at the kirk and known for a weel living woman—the minister should be severe: but it was easy to understand that on such an occasion he had a great deal on his mind. There was a chair at either end of the great sofa that stood against the wall: for in these days furniture was arranged sym-

metrically, and it was not permitted that anything should be without its proper balance. The two women placed themselves there modestly, one at each end; the great arms of the sofa half hid them in the slowly growing twilight. Katrin, who was nearest the door, was blotted out altogether. Beenie, who was at the end nearest the window, showed like a shadow against the light.

And then there was a pause; it was a very solemn pause indeed, like the silence in church. The minister sat in his big chair in the darkest part of the room, with the red glow of a low fire just marking that there was something there, but not a word, not a movement disturbing the dark. The room after a while seemed to turn round to the two watchers, it was so motionless. When Mr. Blythe drew a long breath, a sort of suppressed scream came from both of them. Was it rather a death than a marriage they had come to witness? They had never seen any living thing so still, and the awe of the old man's presence was overwhelming enough in itself.

"What's the matter with you?" he said almost roughly. "Can I not draw my breath in my own house?"

"Oh, sir, I beg your pardon," cried Katrin, thankful to recover her voice. "It was just so awfu' quiet, and we're no used to that. In our bit houses there's nobody but says whatever comes into his head, and we're awfu' steering folk up at Dalrugas Tower."

"Just in the way o' kindness, and giving back an answer when you're spoken to," said Beenie, deferentially, in her soft, half-apologetic voice. It was a great comfort to them in the circumstances, which were very unusual and full of responsibility, to hear themselves speak.

"Ye must just try and possess your souls in patience till ye get back again," the minister said, out of his dark corner. It was just a grand lesson, both thought, and the kind of thing that the minister ought to say. And the silence fell again with a slow diminution of the light and gradual fading of the yellow sky. To sit there without moving, without breathing, with always the consciousness of the minister unseen, fixing a penetrating look upon them, which probably showed him, so clever a man, the very recesses of their hearts, became moment by moment more than Katrin or Robina could bear.

"The young fools; I'll throw it all up if they dinna put in an appearance before that clock strikes," cried Mr. Blythe at last. "Look out of the window, one of you women, and see if ye can see them."

"There's nothing, minister, nothing, but a wheen country carts going from the market," said Beenie, in the *rôle* of Sister Anne.

"The idiots!" said Mr. Blythe again, with that force of language peculiar to his country. "Not for their ain purposes, and them all but unlawful, can they keep their time."

"Oh, sir, ye mustna be hard upon them at siccan a moment!" cried Katrin, rocking herself to and fro in anxiety.

"Eh, but I see the powny!" cried Beenie, from the window, "there's a wee laddie holding Rory. And will I run and open the door no to disturb Marget in the kitchen?" she said, not waiting for an answer. The spell of the quiet had so gained upon Robina, and the still rising tide of excitement, that she swept almost

noiselessly into the narrow hall, and opened the door mysteriously to the two other shadows who stole in, as it seemed, out of the yellow light that filled up the doorway behind, into a darkness which, turning from that wistful illumination, seemed complete.

CHAPTER XX.

It was all like a dream, a scene without light or sound, shadows moving in the faint twilight, at first not a word said. Beenie remained at the door, holding the handle to guard the entrance. Katrin had risen up too, and stood against the wall, trembling very much but not betraying it in this faint light. These two were in the light side of the room, the half made visible by the window with its fading sunset glimmer. The other two passed into the darker side and were all but lost to sight. A sudden flicker of the fire caught the colour of Lily's dress and revealed her outline for the moment. She had taken off her hat, not knowing why, and the soft beaver with its feather was hanging down by her side in her hand. Katrin made a step forward and relieved her of it, trembling lest some dreadful voice should come to her ears out of the darkness, though not seeing the minister's eyes which shot upon her a fiery glance. Then he broke that strange haunted silence in which so many thoughts and passions were hidden, by his voice, suddenly rising, harsh, sounding as if it were loud; it was not at all loud, it was indeed a soft voice on ordinary occasions, only in the circumstances and in the intense quiet it had a strange tone. To Ro-

nald it sounded menacing, to Lily only half alarming, as she knew no reason why it should be less kind than usual; the women were so awestricken already that to them it was as the voice of fate. The brief little ceremony was as simple as could be conceived. The troth was not given as in other rites by the individuals themselves, but simply said by the old minister's deepening voice, which he was at pains to subdue after the shock of the first words, and assented to by the bride and bridegroom, Lily, to the half horror of the two women, who gripped each other wildly in their excitement at the sound, giving an audible murmur of assent, while Ronald bowed, which was the usual form. "Yon'll be the English way," Katrin whispered to Beenie. "Oh whisht, whisht," said the other. And then in the darkness there ensued a few rolling words of prayer, the long vowels solemnly drawn out, the long words following each other slowly and with a certain grandeur of diction in their absolute simplicity—and the formula common to all—"Whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder." And then there was a little stir in the darkness and all was over.

"But there's just this to say to you, young man," came out of the gloom from the old voice, quavering a little with feeling or fatigue, "forasmuch as ye have been wanting before, so much the more are ye pledged now to be all a man ought to be to this young creature that has trusted herself to you. If ever I hear an ill word of your conduct or your care, and me living, you will have one to answer to that will have it in his power to do you an ill turn, and will not refrain. Mind you this; if I am in the land of the living, and know of any hairm

to this poor lassie *I will not refrain*; and ye know what I mean, and that I am one that will do what I say."

"If you think I require to be frightened into loving and cherishing my bonnie wife!" said Ronald confused and alarmed, but attempting to take a high tone.

"Oh, Mr. Blythe!" cried Lily, "how little you know!" She could speak in the dark where no one could see, though the light would have reduced her to silence and blushes. She put her hand with a pretty gesture within Ronald's arm.

"I, maybe, know more than I'm thought to do," he said gruffly; "light that candle that you'll find on the mantelpiece, and let us get our work done." The candle brought suddenly to light the confused scene, all the party standing except the figure of the minister, large and shapeless, in his big chair. And there was a moment of commotion, while one by one they signed the necessary papers, the young pair quickly, the women with a grotesqueness of awe and difficulty which might have transferred the whole scene at once to the regions of the burlesque. Both to Katrin and Robina it was a very solemn business, slowly accomplished with much contortion both of countenance and figure. "Women, can ye not dispatch?" Mr. Blythe said sternly. "My daughter may be here any minute: the time of supposed rest is over, and this sederunt should be over too. Marget will be in from the kitchen with the lamp."

"Oh, Beenie, be quick, quick!" murmured Lily. She had feared to be entreated with the constant hospitality of the Manse to wait until Helen came, and to take tea. It gave her a curious wound to feel that this was not likely to be the case, even though she was most anxious

to escape. She was indeed a little frightened for Marget and the lamp, and for Helen and the tea; but it hurt her that the minister who had just made her Ronald's wife should have any hesitation. Feelings are not generally so fine in rural places. A bride is one to be eagerly embraced, not kept out of sight. Though, indeed, she did not want to see Helen or anyone, she said almost indignantly to herself.

"And now there are your lines, Mistress Lumsden," the minister said. "Keep them safe and never let them out of your own hands, and I wish ye all that is good. If it's been a hasty step or an unconsidered, it's you that will probably have to bear the wyte of it. I will not deceive you with smooth things; but if there has been error at the beginning—"

"Excuse me," said Ronald in a low, fierce voice, "but there is snow in the sky, and it's already dark, and I must take my wife away."

"Don't you interrupt me," said the old minister, "or I will, maybe, say more than I meant to say. If there's been error at the beginning, my poor lassie, take you care to be all the more heedful in time to come. Do nothing ye cannot acknowledge in the face of day. And God bless you, and keep you, and lift up the light of His countenance upon you," he said, lifting up his arms. The familiar action, the familiar words, subdued all the group in a moment. He had not meant with these words to bless the bride that had been brought before him as poor Lily had been—but it had been drawn from him phrase by phrase.

And then the door opened, and Lily found herself once more outside in the keen air touched with the

foretaste of snow which is so distinct in the north. The sky was heavy with it for half the circle from north to south, but in the west was something of that golden radiance still and a clear blueness above, and one or two stars sparkling through the frost. She lifted her eyes to these with relief, with a feeling of consolation. Was that the light of His countenance that was to shine upon her? But below all things were dark and dreary. To the hurry of excitement which had possessed her before, something vexing, troublous, had come in. She had wished, and was eager to hurry away, to escape Helen—but why had she been hurried away, made to perceive that she was not intended to see Helen? It was more fantastic than could be put into words. And Ronald, too, was in so great a hurry, eager to get her beyond the observation of the people coming from the market, almost to hide her in a sheltered corner, while he himself went to get the pony. “Nobody will see you here,” he said. She wished that nobody should see her, but yet an uncalled-for tear came to Lily’s eyes as she stood and waited. It looked almost as if it was a path into heaven, the narrow way which was spoken of in the Bible, that strip of golden light with the stars shining above. But it was not to heaven she wanted to go, in the joy of her espousals, on her wedding day. She wanted the life that was before her; the human, the natural, the life that other women had; to be taken to the home her husband had made for her, to be free of the bonds of her girlhood, and the loneliness of her previous days. But Lily did not know, not even a step of the path before her.

It rushed upon her now that he had never said a

word, never one definite word of that. She did not know what was going to happen to-morrow. To-night it was too late, certainly too late to go further than Dal-rugas—but to-morrow. She remembered now suddenly, clearly, that to all her questions and imaginations what they were to do, he had never made one distinct reply. He had allowed her to talk and to imagine what was going to be, but he had said not a word. There seemed nothing, nothing clear in all the world but that one golden path leading up into the sky. "Lift up the light of His countenance upon you." That did not mean, Lily thought, half pagan as the youthful thinker so often is, the blessing that is life and joy, but rather that which is consolation and calm. And it was not consolation or calm she wanted, but happiness and delight. She wanted to be able to go out upon the world with her arm upon her husband's and her head high, and to shape her new life as other young women did, a separate thing, a new thing, individual to themselves, not any repetition or going back. Standing there in the dark corner, hidden till he could find the pony and take her up secretly out of sight, hurrying away not to be seen by anyone—Lily's heart revolted at these precautions, even though it had been to a certain extent her own desire they should be taken. But oh! it was so different, her own desire! that was only the bridal instinct to hide its shy happiness, its tremor of novelty and wonder. It was not concealment she had wanted, but withdrawal from the gaze of the crowd; but it was concealment that was in Ronald's thought, a thing always shameful, not modest, not maidenly, but an expedient of guilt.

Perhaps Ronald was just a little too long getting the

pony, but he was not very long. He had her safely in the little geeg, with all her wraps carefully round her, before fifteen minutes had passed; but fifteen minutes in some circumstances are more than as many hours in others. Lily was very silent at first, and he had hard ado to rouse her from the reflections that had seized upon her. "What are we going to do?" she said, out of the heaviness of these reflections, when all that found its way to his lips was the babble of love at its climax. Was it that she loved him less than he loved her? He whispered this in her ear, with one arm holding her close, while Rory made his way vigorously along the road, scenting his stable, and also the snow that was coming. Lily made no answer to the suggestion. Certainly that murmur of love did not seem to satisfy her. She was overcome by it now and then, and sat silent, feeling the pressure of his arm, and the consciousness that there was nobody but him and herself in the world, with the seductive bewilderment of emotion shared and intensified—yet from time to time awoke sharply to feel the force over again of that question, "What are we going to do?" Oh, why had she not insisted on an answer to it before? The night grew darker, the snow began to fall in large flakes. They were more and more isolated from the world which was invisible round them, nothing to be divined in it but Rory tossing his shaggy ears and snorting at the snow that melted into his nostrils. By the time they reached the tower, discovering, vaguely all at once, the glimmer of the lights, and the voice of Dougal calling to the pony to moderate the impatience of his delight at sight of his own stable, they were so covered with snow that it was difficult for Lily to shake

herself clear of it as she stumbled down at the great door. "Bide a moment, bide a moment; just take the plaid off her bodily. It's mair snaw than plaiden," cried Dougal. "Ye little deevil, stand still, will ye? Ye'll get neither bite nor sup till your time comes. Have ye no seen the ithers on the road? Silly taupies to bide so long, and maybe be stormsted in the end."

"They're on the road, Dougal," cried Lily, with humility, remembering that she had never once thought of Katrin and Beenie. "I am sure they're on the road."

"They had better be that," he said, angrily. "What keepit them, I'm askin'? Sir, if ye'll be advised by me, ye'll just bid good-bye to the young leddy and make your way to Tam's as fast as ye can, for every half hour will make it waur. It's on for a night and a day, or I have nae knowledge of the weather."

"Half-an-hour can't make much difference, Dougal," said Ronald, with a laugh.

"Oh, can it no? It's easy to see ye ken little of our moor. And the e'en will be as black as midnight, and the snaw bewildering, so that ye'll just turn round and round about, and likely lie down in a whin bush, and never wake more."

A half shriek came from Lily in the doorway, while Ronald's laugh rang out into the night. "It will be no worse in half-an-hour," he said.

"Ay, will it. There's a wee bit light in the west the noo, but there will be nane then. Heigh! is't you? Weel, that's aye something," Dougal said, as the other little vehicle, with its weight of snow-covered figures, came suddenly into the light; and in the bustle of the second arrival, which was much more complicated than the first,

nothing more was said. Katrin and Beenie had shaken off the awe of their conspiracy. They were full of spirits and laughter, and their little cart crowded with parcels of every kind. They had found time to buy half the market, as Dougal said, and they occupied him so completely with their talk, and the bustle of getting them and their cargo safely deposited indoors, that the young couple stole upstairs unnoticed. "Tam may whistle for me to-night," Ronald said, "and Dougal growl till he's tired, and the snow fall as much as it pleases. I'm safe of my shelter, Lily. A friend in court is worth many a year's fee."

"Who is your friend in court?" she said, shivering a little. The cold and the agitation had been a little too much for Lily. Her teeth chattered, the light swam in her eyes.

It was Katrin who was the Providence of the young people. She it was who ordained, peremptorily, not letting Dougal say a word, that to send Mr. Lumsden off to Tam's cottage on such a night was such a thing as had never been heard of.

"I wouldna turn out a dog," she cried, "to find its way, poor beast, across the moor."

"I warned the lad," said Dougal; "I tell'd him every half hour would make it waur. It is his ain fault if he is late. What have you and me to do harbouring a' the young callants in the county—or out of it—that may come here after Miss Lily. You've just got some nonsense about true love in your head."

"Am I the person," said Katrin, "to have true love cast in my face, me that have been married upon you, Dougal, these thirty year? Na, na! I'm no that kind

of woman; but I have peety in my heart, and there's a dozen empty rooms in this house. I think it's just a shame, when I think of the poor bodies that are about, maybe sleepin' out on the cauld moor. I'll not take the life of this young lad, turning him away, and neither shall you, my man, if you want to have any comfort in your ain life."

"I warned him," said Dougal; "if he didna take my warning it's his ain wyte."

"It shanna be mine nor yours either," said Katrin, and, indeed, even Dougal, when he looked out, perceived that there was nothing to be said. The snow had fallen so continuously since their arrival, that already every trace, either of wheels or hoofs, was filled up. The whiteness lay unbroken in the courtyard and up to the very door as if no one had come near the house for days. Sandy was in the stable with his lantern, hissing over the little black pony as he rubbed him down; but even Sandy's steps to the stable were wiped out by the snow-storm. It covered everything, fair things and foul, and, above all, every trace of a path or road.

"I'm no easy in my mind about what Sir Robert would say," he muttered, pushing his cap to his other ear.

"And what would Sir Robert say? If it had been a lad on the tramp, a gangrel person or selling prins about the road, he would never have grudged him a bed, or at the worst, a pickle straw in the stable on such a night. And this is a young gentleman of the family of the Lumsdens of Pontalloch, kentfolk, and as much thought of as any person. Is't a pickle straw the Laird would have offered to a gentleman's son like that? He's just biding here till the storm's over, if it was a week

or a fortnight; and I'll answer for it to the Laird," Katrin cried.

Dougal looked at her in consternation. "A week or a fortnight! It's no decent for the young leddy," he said.

"It's just a grand chance for the young lady—company to pass the time till her, and her all her lane. If he will bide—but maybe he will not bide," said Katrin, with a sigh. Katrin, too, was a little anxious, as Lily was, for what to-morrow would bring forth. She had but taken the bull by the horns, in Dougal's person, saying the worst that could be said. "But it's my hope, Beenie," she said afterwards, with an anxious countenance, "that he'll just take his bonnie wife on his arm and away to his ain house as soon as the snaw's awa'."

"Oh, ay! ye needna have any doubt of that," said Beenie, with a broad smile of content.

"Then you'll just take off your grand gown and serve them with their dinner. I have naething but the birds to put to the fire, and that will take little time; and if they never had a good dinner before nor after, they shall have one that any prince might eat—between you and me, Robina, poor things, on their wedding night."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE snowstorm lasted for about a week, day after day, with an occasional interval, with winds that drifted it, and dreadful nights of frost that made it shrink, but covered it over with sparkling crystals: and with occasional movements of a more genial temperature, that

touched the surface only to make it freeze again more fiercely when that relenting was over. The whole landscape was turned to whiteness, and the moor, with all its regular lines, rounded as if a heavy white blanket had been laid over the hummocks of the ling and the hollows and deep cuttings. The hills were white, too, but showing great seams and crevices of darkness, from which all the magical colour had been taken by the absence of light. Black and white was what everything was reduced to, like the winter Alps, with a grey sky overhead still heavy with inexhaustible snow. This snowstorm was "a special providence" to the inhabitants of Dalrugas: at least, to most of them. Dougal grumbled, and suggested various ways in which it might be possible for the lad from Edinburgh to get away. He might walk two miles north, to a village on the main road, where the coach was bound to pass every lawful day, whether it snowed or whether it blew: or he might get the geeg from the inn at Kinloch-Rugas to carry him south, and strike the route of another coach also bound to travel on every lawful day. But Dougal talked to the air, and nobody gave him heed: not to say that the gentleman from Edinburgh found means to conciliate him by degrees, and that, at last, a crack with Mr. Lumsden became a great relief to Dougal from the unmitigated chatter of the womankind by which he was surrounded night and day.

This week of snow flew as if on wings. They were shut off from all intrusion, and even from every invading question, by the impossibility of overstepping that barrier which nature had placed around them: they lived as in a dream, which circumstances had thus made possible

without any strain of nature. Nobody could turn a stranger out into the snow, not Sir Robert himself. Had he been there, however little he liked his visitor, he would have been compelled to keep him in his house, and treat him like a favoured guest. Not even an enemy's dog could have been turned out into the snow. It made everything legitimate: everything simple and natural. I don't know that Lily required this thought to support her, for, indeed, she was not at that time aware that any secret was made of the marriage, that it was concealed from anyone in the house—even Dougal; or that Helen Blythe, at the Manse, for instance, had not been made aware of it by that time. She had never clearly entered into the question why Helen Blythe had not been present; why the ceremony had been performed in the darkening, and so much mystery had surrounded it: except by the natural reason that no observation which could be avoided should be drawn upon the bride, and that, indeed, all possibility of vulgar remark should be guarded against. The question, What was to be done next? had filled Lily's mind on that day: but the snow had silenced it and covered it over like the ling bushes and the burn, which no longer made its usual thrill of running remark, but was also hushed and bound by the new conditions which modified all the life of this portion of the earth. The moor and all its surroundings hung between heaven and earth in a great silence during this period. The grey sky hung low, so that it seemed as if an unwary wayfarer, if he went far enough against that heavy horizon, might strike against it, blinded as he must have been by the whirling flakes that danced and fluttered down, sometimes quickening

in pace like the variations of a swift strathspey, sometimes falling large and deliberate like those dilated flakes of fire that fell on the burning sands in the *Inferno*. There were no images, however different in sentiment, that might not have been applied to that constant falling. It was snow—always snow—and yet there was in it all the varieties of poetry, when you looked at it, so to speak, from within, looking through it upon an empty world in which no other life or variety seemed to be left.

Sometimes, however, the pair sallied forth, notwithstanding the snow, to breathe the crisp and frosty air, and to feel with delight the great atmosphere and outdoor world around them instead of four walls. Lily wore a great camlet cloak, rough, but a protection against both wet and chill, with a large silver clasp under her chin, and her head and shoulders warmly hooded and wrapped in her plaid of the Ramsay colour, which she wore as fair Ramsays did in Allan Ramsay's verse. Lily's eyes sparkled under the tartan screen, and not to risk the chilling of a hand which it would have been necessary to put forth to clasp his arm, Ronald in his big coat walked with his arm round her, to steady her on the snow: for every path was obliterated and they never knew when they might not stumble over a stifled burn, or among the heathery hillocks of the moor. These walks were not long, but they were delightful in the stillness and loveliness, the white flakes clothing them all over in another coat, lighting upon Lily's hair and Ronald's beard, getting into their eyes, half blinding them with the sudden moisture, and the laughter that followed. I will not attempt to give any account of the

talk with which they beguiled both these devious rambles and the long companionship indoors in the warm drawing-room from which they looked out with so much comfort on the white and solitary world. It harmonised and made everything legitimate—that lucky snow. One could not ask, “What shall we do to-morrow?” in the sight of the absolute impossibility of doing anything. It was not the bridegroom, but Nature herself who had arranged this honeymoon. If it would but last! but then it was in the nature of things that it could not last.

The frost began to break up a little on the eighth day—or rather it was not the frost that broke up, but the sky that cleared. In the evening instead of the heavy grey there came a break which the sky looked through, and in it a star or two, which somehow changed altogether the aspect of affairs. That evening, as she stood looking out at the break so welcome to everybody—but which she was not so sure of welcoming as other people were—Lily felt the question again stir, like a bird in its nest, in the hushed happiness of her heart. In the morning, when she looked out upon a world that had again become light, with blue overhead, and a faint promise of sun, and no snow falling, it came back more strongly, this time like a secret ache. The women and Dougal and Sandy and even the ponies were full of delight in the end of the storm. “What a bonnie morning!” they shouted to each other, waking Lily from her sleep. A bonnie morning! There was colour again on the hills and colour in the sky. The distance was no longer shut out, as by a door, by the heavy firmament: it was remote, it was full of air, it led away into the world—into worlds unseen. As Lily gazed a golden ray

came out of it and struck along the snow in a fine line. Oh, it was bonnie! as they called to each other in the yard, as Rory snorted in his stable and all the chickens cackled, gathering about Katrin's feet. The snow was over! The storm was over! In a little while the whiteness would disappear and the moor would be green again. "What are we going to do?" All Nature seemed to ask the question.

"I wish," said Ronald, "those fowls would cease their rejoicings about the end of the snow. I wish the snow could have lasted another fortnight, Lily: though perhaps I should not say that, for I could not have taken advantage of it. I should need to have invented some means of getting away."

"Because you were tired of it, Ronald?" she said with a smile: but the smile was not so bright as it had been. It was not Lily's snow-smile, all light and radiance: it was one into which the question had come, a little wistful, a little anxious. Ronald saw, and his heart grieved at the change.

"That's the likely reason," he said with a laugh, "but oh, Lily, my bonnie love, here is the Parliament House all astir again, the judges sitting, and the work begun."

"Well," she said, that smile of hers shooting out a pure beam of fire upon him, "I am ready, Ronald; I am ready, too."

"Ready to speed the parting husband, and to wish me good luck?" he said, with a faint quiver in his voice. He was not a coward by nature, but Ronald this time was afraid. He had not forgotten the question, "What are we going to do?" which had been ex-

pressed in every line of Lily's face, in every tone of her voice, before the evening of the marriage. He knew it had come again, but he did not know how he was to meet it. He plunged into the inevitable conflict with his heart in his mouth.

"To speed the parting— Are you going, Ronald, are you thinking of going—without me?"

"My dearest," he said, spreading out his hands in deprecation, "it's like rending me asunder; it is like tearing my heart out of my bosom."

"I am not asking you what it is like," cried Lily. "What I am asking is your meaning. Were you thinking of going without me?"

"Lily, Lily!" he said, "don't be so dreadfully hard upon me! What am I to do? I know nothing else that I can do."

"Oh, if it's only that!" she said, "I can tell you, and very easy, what to do. You will just take me down to Kinloch-Rugas, or to that other place where the coach stops, and wrap me well in my camlet cloak and in my tartan plaid—and I'll not feel the cold, not so much as you will, for women's blood is warm—and when we get to Edinburgh we will take the topmost storey of a house, and make it as warm as a nest, and get the first sunshine and the bonnie view away to Fife and the north. And Beenie will follow us with my things and her own: but we'll just be all alone for the first day or two, and I will make you your dinner with my own hands," said Lily, holding up those useful implements with a look of triumph, which was, alas! too bright, which was like the sun when a storm is coming: brilliant with alarm and a sense of something very different to come.

"They don't look very fit for it, those bits of white hands," he said, eager, if possible, by any means, to divert her from the more important question—and he took her hands in his and kissed them: but Lily was not to be diverted in this way.

"You may think what you like of how they look—but they are just a very useful pair of hands, and can cook you a Scots collop, or a chicken, or fish in sauce, as well as any person. I know what I have undertaken, and if you think I will break down, you are mistaken, Ronald Lumsden, in me."

"I am not mistaken in you, Lily. I know there is nothing you could not do if you were to try: but am I to be the one to make a drudge of my Lily? I would like her to eat of the fat and drink of the sweet, as the ministers say, and have no trouble all her days?"

"It depends upon what you call trouble," said Lily, still holding up her flag. "Trouble I suppose we shall have, sooner or later, or we'll be more than mortal: but to serve you your dinner is what I would like to do. You'll go out to the Parliament House and work to get the siller—for it must be allowed that between us we have not much of the siller, and you cannot buy either collops or chuckies without it, nor scarcely even a haddie or a herring out of the sea. But that's the man's share. And then I will buy it, and clean it, and put it on in the pot, and you will eat of your wife's cooking and your heart will be glad. Do you think I want to go back to Moray Place, or a fine house in one of the new crescents, and sit with my hands before me? Not me, not me!"

"My bonnie Lily," he cried, "it's a bonnie dream, and like yourself; and if you only cooked a crust it would be better than all the grand French kickshaws in the world, or the English puddings, to me."

"You need not be so humble, sir," said Lily, "I will cook no crust. It will be savoury meat, such as thy soul loveth; though I'll not cheat you as that designing woman, Rebekah, did."

"My bonnie Lily, you'll always do more for me, and better for me, than I deserve," he cried. "Is that the postman, for the first time, coming up the road from the town?"

They went to the window to look out at this remarkable phenomenon, and there he kept her, pointing out already the break of the snow upon the side of the moor, revealing the little current of the burn, and something of the edge of the road, along which—wonderful sight!—that solitary figure was making its way. "But it will not be passable, I think, till to-morrow, for any wheeled thing, so we will make ourselves happy for another day," Ronald said: and this was all the answer he gave her. He was very full of caresses, of fond speeches and lover's talk all day. He scarcely left an opening for anything more serious. If Lily began again with her question he always found some way of stopping her mouth. Perhaps she was not unwilling, in a natural shrinking from conflict, to have her mouth stopped. But there rose between them an uneasy sense of something to be explained, something to be unravelled; a desire on one side which was to encounter on the other resistance not to be overcome.

Ronald went out to Dougal after dinner and stood

by him while he suppered the pony. "I think the roads will be clear to-morrow, Dougal," he said.

"I wouldna wonder," said Dougal. His opinion was that the lad from Edinburgh would just sorn on there for ever, eating Sir Robert's good meat, and would never more go away.

"Which do you think would be best? to lend me Rory and the little cart to take me in to Kinloch-Rugas, or to send for the geeg from the inn to catch the coach on the South Road?"

"I could scarcely gie an opinion," said Dougal. "A stoot gentleman o' your age might maybe just as easy walk."

When Dougal said "a stoot gentleman" he did not mean to imply that Ronald was corpulent, but that he was a strong fellow and wanted no pony to take him four miles.

"That's true enough," said Ronald, "but there's my portmanteau, which is rather heavy to carry."

"As grand as you—" Dougal began, but then he stopped and reflected that he was, so to speak, on his own doorstep (in the absence of Sir Robert), and that it was a betrayal of all the traditions of hospitality to be rude to a guest—especially to one who was about to take himself away. "Weel," he added quickly, with a push to his bonnet, "I canna spare you Rory, the young leddy might be wanting a ride; but Sandy and the black powny will take in the bit box, if ye're sure that you've made up your mind—at last."

"I daresay you thought I was never going to do that," Ronald said, with a laugh.

And then Dougal melted too. "Oh," he said, "I

just thought you knew when you were in good quarters," in a more friendly voice.

"And did not you think I was a sensible fellow," said the amiable guest, "to lie warm and feed well instead of fighting two or three days, or maybe more, through the snow? But now the Courts are opened, and the judges sitting, and everybody waiting for me. I would much rather bide where I am, but I must go."

"If it's for your ain interest," said Dougal: "and I wudna wonder but ye're a wee tired of seeing naebody and doing naething, no even a gun on your shoulder. I'll bid the laddie be ready, I'll say at sax of the clock."

"Six o'clock," said Ronald, in dismay, "the coach does not leave till ten."

"Weel, I'll say aicht if you like. You should be down in good time. Whiles there are a heap of passengers, and mair especial after a storm like this, that has shut up a' the roads."

"I shall be very much obliged to you, Dougal. I have been obliged to you all the time. I will explain the circumstances to Sir Robert if he is in Edinburgh in the spring, and I will tell him that Katrin and you have been more than kind."

"'Deed, and if I were you," said Dougal, "I would just keep a calm sough and say naething to Sir Robert. He might wonder how ye got here—he would maybe no think that our young leddy—I'm wanting no certificate frae ainy strange gentleman," said Dougal, "and least said is soonest mended. There are folk that canna bide to hear their ain house spoke of by a stranger, nor friends collecting about it that might maybe no just be approved. No, no, haud you your tongue and keep

your ain counsel; and so far as things have gaen, you'll hear nae more about it frae Katrin or me."

Ronald was confounded by this speech. "So far as things have gaen"—had this rough fellow any idea how far they had gone? Had his wife told him what happened in the Manse parlour? Had his suspicions penetrated the whole story? But Dougal turned back to the pony with a preference so unaffected, and whistled "Charlie is my darling" with so distinct an intention of dismissing his interlocutor, that Ronald could not imagine him to see in the least into the mill-stone of this involved affair. Dougal was much more occupied with his own affairs than either those of Lily or those so very little known to him of the strange gentleman who had kept Lily company during the Daft Days—the Saturnalia of the year. He proceeded with his work, pausing sometimes to swing his arms and smite his breast for cold, clanking out and in through the warm atmosphere of the stable to the wildly cold and sharp air outside, absorbed more than was at all necessary in the meal and the toilet of Rory, and taking no further heed of the guest.

CHAPTER XXII.

"AT last," said Ronald, coming upstairs with his light springing foot three steps at a time, though with a slight slip on that worn step at the top,—“at last, Lily: I have settled with Dougal, and I am starting to-morrow morning; at eight, he says, but nine will do. And this for a little while, my darling, will be my last night in the nest.”

The room had undergone a wonderful change since it had first been Lily's bower. It had changed much while she was there alone, but the change was much greater within the last week than all that had happened before. It had become a home—there were two chairs by the fire, there was an indefinable consciousness in everything of two minds, two people, the union and conjunction which makes society. It was all warm, social, breathing of life, no suggestion in it of loneliness or longing, or unsatisfied thought, or the solitude which breathes a chill through every comfort. Lily, sitting alone, had been, it was very clear, left but for a moment. This sentiment cannot indeed expand stone walls, yet the once dull and chilly drawing-room, with its deep, small windows, seemed to possess a widened circle, a fuller atmosphere. Into this already had there pushed a care or two, the reflection of the diversities of two minds, as well as their union? if so, it only helped to widen the sphere still further, to make it more representative of the world. Lily looked up from the book she had taken up in her husband's absence, with a change of countenance and sudden exclamation.

"*You* are going to-morrow? not *we*?" she cried.

"My bonnie Lily, you were always reasonable—how could it be *we*? I'm thankful, though, that you meant it to be *we*—for it was not a happy thought that my own lassie, my wife of a week old, was pushing me away, back with the first loosening of the frost, into the world."

"You never thought that—you never could have thought that!" cried Lily, divided between indignation and a tumult of new feeling that rose in her. And then

she covered her face with her hands. "Are you going to leave me here, Ronald, my lane, my lane?" she cried, with a tone of anguish in her voice.

He was behind her, drawing her head upon his shoulder, soothing her in every way he knew. "Oh, Lily, my darling, don't say I have beguiled you! What could it be else, what could it be? I might have held out by myself and kept away. I might have sworn I would never go near you, for your sweet sake. Would you rather I had done that, Lily? Is it not better to belong to each other, my darling, at any cost, so as to be ready in a moment to take advantage of a bright day when it comes?"

"Of a bright day when it comes?" she said, suddenly taking her hands from her face. A chill as if of the ice outside came upon Lily. She was as white as the snow, and cold, and trembled. "Is that all, is that all that is between you and me, Ronald?" she cried.

"Now, Lily, my dearest, how can you ask such a question?—is that all? nothing is all! There are no bounds to what is between you and me; but because we have to be parted for a time, that was not a reason for always keeping apart, was it, Lily? I thought, my darling, you agreed with me there. We have had a happy honeymoon as ever any pair had—happier, I think, than ever any blessed man but me— And now I must go out to the bleak world to work for my bonnie wife. Oh, it will be a bleak world no longer, it will all be bright with the thought that it is for my bonnie Lily. And you will just wait, and keep your heart in a kist of gold, and lock it with a silver key."

"Ah, that was what she says she should have done.

before!—" cried Lily, with a sharp ring of pain in her voice. Then she subdued herself and looked up into his face. "I am ready to share whatever you have, Ronald. I want no luxuries—no grand house. I want no time to get ready. I'll be up before you to-morrow and my little things in a bundle and ready to follow you—if it was in a baggage-waggon or at the plough's tail!"

"I almost wish it was that," he said, eager for any diversion. "If I had been a ploughman lad, coming over the hills to Nannie, oh! with a little cot to take her to, as soon as she could be my own." These were echoes of the songs Lily had sung to him, and he to her, in their hermitage when shut in by the snow.

"But just up under the roof in a high house in the old town—or one of the new ones out to the west of Princes Street—that new row, with a nice clean stair and a door to it, to shut it in; to me that would be as good as any little cot upon the ploughed fields." Lily spoke eagerly, turning round to him with hands involuntarily clasped.

"A strange place," he said, "for Sir Robert Ramsay's heir."

"Oh, what am I caring for Sir Robert Ramsay! If he was ill and wanted me, I would be at his call night and day—he is my uncle, whatever happens: but because he is rich and can leave me a fortune!—that is nothing, Ronald, to you and me."

He made no immediate reply, but smoothed the little curls of her hair upon her forehead, which was at once an easier and a much more pleasant thing to do.

"Besides," she said, "I have known plenty of kent

folk, as good as you or me, who lived and just liked it very well, up a common stair."

"I would not like my Lily, coming out of Moray Place, to set up in life like that."

"Would you like your Lily," she cried, again turning upon him with glowing cheeks, "to sit alone and pingle at her seam and eat her heart away, even at Moray Place, where she might see you whiles?—or worse still here, at Dalrugas," she said, springing from her seat with energy, "to be smooored in the snow?"

He followed her round to the window, and stood holding her in his arm and looking at her admiringly. "You will never be smooored in the snow, my Lily! The fire in you is enough to melt it into rivers all about."

"Rivers that will carry me—where?" she cried in a tone half of laughter, half of despair.

"Listen to me, my darling," he said. "We will be practical; there is always the poetry to fall back upon. For one thing—I've no house, even if it were up a common stair or in the highest house of the old town, to take you to. Houses, as you know as well as I, can only be got at the term. There is no chance now till Whitsunday of finding one. We must just be patient, Lily, we can do no more. It is not you, my darling, that will suffer the most. Think of me in all the old places that will mind me of you at every moment, and seeing all the folk that know you, and even hearing your name—"

"Oh," cried Lily—and then suddenly she fell a-crying, leaning on her husband—"I would like to hear your name now and then, just to give me heart; and to see the folk that know you, and the old places—"

"My bonnie Lily!" he cried.

Perhaps this outburst did her good. She cried for a long time, and all the evening an occasional sob interrupted her voice, like the lingering passion of a child. But Lily, like a child, had to yield to that voice of the practical—the voice of reason. She said no more at least, but sadly assisted at the packing of the portmanteau which had been brought across the snow somehow from the cottage in which Roland had found refuge before the storm and all its privileges began.

"I am not going with him," she said to Robina when these doleful preparations were over. "You see there are no preparations made, and you cannot get a house between the terms. You might have minded me of that, Beenie. What is the use of being a person of experience if you cannot tell folk that are apt to forget?"

"I ought to have minded, my bonnie dear," said Beenie with penitence.

"And it's a long time till Whitsunday: but we'll need to have patience," Lily said.

"So we will, my darling bairn," Beenie replied.

"You say that very cut and dry. You are not surprised; you look as if you had known it all the time."

"Eh, Miss Lily, my dear, how could I help but ken? Here's a young gentleman that has little siller, and not the mate that Sir Robert would choose."

"I wish," cried Lily, "that Sir Robert was at the bottom of the sea! No, no, I'm wishing him no harm—but oh, if he only had nothing to do with me."

"The only thing ye canna do in this world is to change your blood and kin," said Beenie, "but oh, Miss Lily, ye must just be real reasonable and think. If he

were to take you away it would spoil a'. He has gotten you for his ain, and you have gotten him for your ain, and nothing can come between you two. But he hasna the siller to give ye such a down-sitting as you should have, and nae house at all possible at this time of the year. No, I'm no way surprised. I just knew that was how it had to be—and Katrin too. It would be just flyin' in the face of Providence, she says, to take ye away off to Edinburgh, without a place for the sole of your foot—when ye have a' your uncle's good house at your disposition, and good living and folk about you that tak' a great interest in you. Katrin herself, she canna bide the thought of losing her bonnie leddy. 'If Miss Lily goes, I'll just take my fit in my hand and go away after her,' she says. But what for should ye go? It will be far more comfortable here."

"Comfortable!" said Lily in high disdain, "and parted from my husband." The word was not familiar to her lips, and it brought a flush of colour over her face.

"Oh whisht, my bonnie leddy," Beenie cried.

"Why should I whisht, for it is true? I might not have said it before, but I will say it now, for where he is I ought to be—and whatever he has I ought to share—and what do I care for Dougal's birds and Katrin's fine cooking when my Ronald (that has aye a fine appetite for his dinner," cried Lily in a parenthesis with a flash of her girlish humour) "is away?" The last words were said in a drooping tone. Her mood changed like the changing skies. Even now she had eruptions of laughter into the midst of her trouble, which was not yet trouble indeed, so long as he was still not absolutely

gone; and who could tell what might happen before morning—the chill morning of the parting day?

Lily was up and astir early on that terrible morning—there had been a hope in her mind that Providence would re-tighten the bonds of the frost and bring the snow blinding and suffocating to stop all possibility of travel; but, alas! that was not the case—bands of faint blue diversified the yellow greyness of the clouds, and the early sun gave a bewildering glint over the moor, making the snow garment shrink a little more and show its rents and crevices. Everything was cheerfully astir in the yard, the black pony rearing as Sandy backed him into the shafts of the cart, snorting and shaking his head for joy at thought of the outing, and the sniff of the fresh, exhilarating air into which, as yet, there had come little of the limpness of the thaw. There was an air out of doors partly of pleasure in the excitement of the departure, or, at least, in the little commotion about something which is an agreeable break in the monotony of all rural solitudes. Dougal looked on and criticised with his hands in his pockets and gave Sandy directions as if this were the first time the boy had ever touched the pony which had been his charge for more than a year; and Katrin too stood at the door watching all these preparations, though the air was cold as January air could be. Upstairs there was a very different scene. Lily had tried to insist upon driving to the town to see her husband off, a proposal which was crushed by both Ronald and Robina with horror. “Expose yourself to the whole countryside!” Beenie cried.

“Expose myself! and me his wife! Who should see him off if not his wife?” said Lily. And then

Ronald came behind her and drew her against his breast once more.

"My bonnie Lily! We need not yet flourish that before the world; you are as safe here as a bird in its nest; why should we set everybody talking about you and me? Sir Robert will hear soon enough and there is no need to send him word. There's nobody to penetrate our secret and publish it, if you will be patient a little till better things can be."

"Our secret!" said Lily, springing from his hold with a great cry.

"A secret that is well shared by those that care for my Lily; but we need not flourish it before the world." Lily's colour rose from pale to red, then faded. She stood apart from him, her countenance changing; her pride was deeply wounded that she should be supposed to be desirous of flourishing anything before the world. It was an injury to her and a scorn, though this was no moment to resent it, and the sharp impression only mingled with the anguish of parting a sense of being wronged and misjudged, which was very hard to bear. "I may come down to the door, I suppose," she said, in a voice from which she tried to banish every tone of offence.

"No, my darling," he said, "not even to the door. I could not say farewell to my Lily with strangers looking on. I will like to think when I am gone of everything round you here—all the old chairs and tables, even, where my Lily and I have had our honeymoon." Oh, there was nothing to complain of in the warmth of his farewell. No man could have loved his young wife better, or have held her close to him with deeper feel-

ing. "I will soon be back, I will soon be back!" he cried; his eyes were wet like hers. It was as great a thing for him to tear himself away as it was for her to remain behind and see him go. But then Lily could only stand trembling and weeping at the head of the stairs, that nobody might see, and catch a distorted glimpse, through the window over the door, of the cart into which he got with Sandy, while Dougal still murmured that "a stoot gentleman would have done better to walk"—and to see him hold out his hand to sulky Dougal, and to Katrin, who had her apron at her eyes, and Beenie, who was sobbing freely! They could stand there and cry, but she might not go downstairs lest she should flourish her story before the world? And why should she not, after all, flourish it before the world? Is a marriage a thing to be hid? When the little cart drove away—the pony, very fresh after his long confinement, executing many gambols—Lily went back to her window from which she could see them disappear under the high bank, coming out again lower down. The deep road was so filled up with snow that the moment of disappearance was a very short one, and then she could trace for a long time along the road the little dark object growing less and less, till it disappeared altogether. The pony's gambols which, though he was too far off to be distinctly visible, still showed in the meandering of his progress, and sudden changes of pace, the head of one figure showing over the other, the gradual obliteration in the grey of distance kept all her faculties occupied. It seemed hours, though it was but a very little time when Lily let her head droop on the arm of the old-fashioned sofa and abandoned herself to the

long-gathering, long-restrained torrent and passion of tears.

It was a heavy, dreary day. When you begin life very early in the morning, it ought to be for something good, for some natural festivity or holiday—in the light of which the morning goes brightening on to some climax, be it a happy arrival for which the moments are counted, or a birthday party. But to begin with a parting and live the livelong day after it, every hour more mournful and more weary, is a melancholy thing. This used to be very common in the old days, when travelling was slower, and night trains not invented, and night coaches not much thought of. It added a great deal to the miseries of a farewell—in the evening there is but little time before the people who are left behind, they have an excuse for shutting themselves up—going to bed—most likely, if they are young, sleeping before they know—with to-morrow always a new day before them. But Lily had to live it all out, not excused by Beenie or her other faithful retainer a single hour or a single meal. They brought her her dinner just as though he had not shared it with her yesterday, and pressed her to eat, and made a grievance of the small amount she swallowed. “What is the use,” Katrin said, majestically, “of taking all this trouble when Miss Lily turns her back upon it and will not eat a morsel?” “Oh, try a wee bit, Miss Lily,” Beenie cried—adding in her ear, with a coaxing kindness that was insupportable, “do you think he would relish the cauld snack he’ll be getting on the road if he thought his bonnie leddy was not touching bite or sup?”

“Go away, or you will drive me daft,” said Lily.

“He will just clear the board of everything that’s on it and never think of me. Why should he, with such a fine appetite as he has? Do I want him to starve for me?” she cried, with a laugh. But the result was another fit of tears. In short, Lily was as silly as any girl could be on the day her lover left her. She was not even as she had been for a moment, and was bound to be again, a young wife astonished and disappointed at being left behind, not knowing how to account for this strange, new authority over her, which had in its power to change the whole current of her life. She had never looked at Ronald in that light or thought of him as a power over her—a judge, a law-giver, whose decisions were to be supreme. She was astonished to find herself subdued before him now, her own convictions put aside, but this was not the channel in which for the moment her thoughts were running. She was weeping for her lover, for the happiness that was over, for him who was away, and dreaming dreams to herself of how the coach might be stopped by the snow, or some accident happen that would still bring him back. She imagined to herself his step on the stair and the shriek of joy with which she would rush to welcome him. This was the subject of her thoughts, broken into occasionally by divergences to other points, by outbursts of astonishment, of disappointment, almost of resentment, but always returning as to the background and foundation of everything. The other thoughts lay in waiting for her, biding their time. It was the dreadful loss, the blank, the void, the silence that afflicted her now. Ronald gone, who, for this week, which had been as years, as a whole life, her life, the real and true one

to which all the rest was only a preface and preliminary—had been her companion, almost herself! It was of this that her heart was full. Without him what was Lily now? She had been often a weary, angry, dull, disappointed little girl before, but there were always breaks in which she felt herself, as she said, her own woman, and was herself, all the Lily there was. But now she had merged into another being, she was Lily no longer, but only a broken-off half of something different, something more important, all throbbing with enlarged and bigger life. This consciousness was enough for the girl to master during that endless, dreary, monotonous day.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE next day after anything, whether happiness or disaster, is different from the day on which the event took place. The secondary comes in to complicate and confuse the original question more or less, and the abstract ends under that compulsion. Nothing is exactly as it seems, nor indeed as it is—it takes a colour from the next morning, however opaque that morning may be. This was especially the case with Lily, whom so many of these secondary thoughts had already visited, and who had now to go back from the dream of that eight days in which everything had been put to flight by that extraordinary invasion of the new and unrealised which comes to every girl with her marriage, and amid which it is so difficult to keep the footing of ordinary life. She was that morning, however, not any longer the parted lover, the mourning bride, but again, more or less, “her own woman,” the creature, full of energy, and life, and thoughts, and purposes of her own, who had not blindly loved or worshipped, but to whom, at all times, it had been apparent that Ronald’s way of loving, though it was to her the only way, was not the way she would have chosen or which she would have adopted herself had she been the man. A very different man Lily would have made—much less prudent, no doubt, but how decisive in the beginning of that youthful career!

how determined to have no secrets, but everything as open as the day, to involve the woman beloved in no devious paths—but to preserve her name and her honour above all dictates of worldly wisdom. Lily would have had her lover vindicate her at once from her uncle's tyranny. She would have had him provide the humble home for which she longed, without even suffering his lady to bear the ignominy of that banishment to the moor. And now! with what a flame of youthful love and hope Lily would have had him carry off his bride, snapping his fingers with a Highland shout at all the powers of evil, who would have had no chance to touch them in their honest love and honourable union. Oh, if she had been the man! Oh, if she could have showed him what to do!

And all these thoughts, intensified and increased, came back to Lily the day after her husband left her. She was not drooping and longing now for her departed lover. Her energies, her clear sense of what should have been, her objection to all that was, came back upon her like a flood. She sat no longer at the window gazing out upon the expanse of snow, which shrank more and more, and showed greater and blacker crevices in its wide expanse every hour—but walked up and down the room, pausing now and then to poke the fire with energy, though the glowing peats were not adapted to that treatment, and flew in tiny morsels about, requiring Beenie's swift and careful ministrations. Lily felt, however, for one thing, that her position was far better now for expounding her views than it had ever been. A girl cannot press upon her lover the necessity of action. She has to wait for him to take the first step, to urge it upon

her, however strongly she may feel the pressure of circumstances, the inexpediency of delay. But now she could plead her own cause, she could make her own claim of right, her statement of what she thought best. She said to herself that she had never yet tried this way. She had been compelled to wait for him to do it: but perhaps it was no wrong thing in him, perhaps it was only exaggerated tenderness for her, desire to save her from privations, or what he thought privations, that had prevented any bolder action, and made him think first of all of saving her from any discomfort. It was possible to think that, and it was very possible to show him now that she cared for no discomfort, that her only desire was to be with him—that it was far, far better for Lily to meet the gaze of the world in her own little house, however small it might be, than hide in the solitude as if there was something about her that should be concealed. This thought made Lily's countenance blaze like the glowing peat. Something about her that should be concealed! a secret hidden away in the heart of the moor, in the midst of the snow—which he, going away from her, would keep silent about—silent, as if it were a shame! Lily threw herself into the chair beside her writing-table with impetuosity, feeling that not a moment should be lost in putting this impossible case before him and making her claims. She was no fair Rosamond, but his wife—a thing to be concealed; oh, no, no! She would rather die.

In any case, she would have written him a long letter, seizing the first possible moment of communicating with him—carrying out the first instinct of her heart to continue the long love-interview, which had made this week

the centre of all her days. But Lily threw even more than this into her letter. She said more, naturally, than she intended to say, and brought forth a hundred arguments, each more eloquent, more urgent than the other, to show cause why she should join him immediately, why she should not be left, nobody knowing anything about her, in this Highland hermitage. The lines poured from her pen; she was herself so moved by her own pleas, that she got up once or twice and walked about to dissipate the impulse which she had to set out at once, to walk, if it were needful, to Edinburgh, to claim her proper place. And it was not till the long, glowing, fervent letter was written, that she paused a little and asked herself if Ronald had really only left her behind because it was impossible to get a house between the terms, if his first business was to look out for a house, so as to have it ready for her by the next term, by Whitsunday, was it right to argue with him and upbraid him as if he intended the separation to go on for ever? Lily threw down her pen which she had dipped in fire—not the fire of anger, but of love just sharpened and pointed with a little indignation, and her countenance fell. No, if that were so, she must not address him in this heroic way. After all it was quite reasonable what he had said—it was extremely difficult to get a house between the terms. And perhaps he would not have been justified in engaging one at Michaelmas, before anything was decided what to do. He could not have done that; and what then could he do but wait till Whitsunday? and, for a man like him, with his own ways of action, not unfortunately, though she loved him, like Lily's it was perhaps natural that

there should be no premature disclosure, that as they were parted by circumstances, it should remain so, without taking the world into their confidence, or summoning Sir Robert to cast his niece, who had deceived him, out of the shelter which her husband did not think unbecoming for her now. Lily threw down her pen, making a splash of ink upon the table, not a large one to spoil it, but a mark—which would always remind her of what she had done or had been about to do.

And then there fell a pause upon her spirit, and tears were the only relief for her. To take the heroic way, to walk to Edinburgh through the snow, or even to think of doing so—to pour forth an eloquent appeal against the cruel fate of her isolation and concealment as if it were to last for ever, was an easier method than to wait patiently until Whitsunday and make the best of everything, which would really be the wise thing—for what could Ronald do more than that which he could of course begin to do as soon as he arrived—to look for a house? And how could it have been expected of him when everything was so vague, and he did not know what might happen, to have provided one, months in advance, on the mere chance that he could persuade her into that strange marriage, and the minister into doing it? It would be strange and embarrassing after that scene to see the minister again, and Lily fell a-wondering how Ronald had persuaded him, what he had said. Mr. Blythe was not a very amiable man, ready to do what was asked from him. He made objections about most things and hated trouble. But Ronald could persuade anybody; he could wile a bird from the tree. And what a grand quality that was for

an advocate! and how proud she would be hereafter to go to the Court and hear him make his grand speeches. Perhaps now he would talk over some man that wanted to get rid of his house and make him see that it would be better to do it now than to wait for the term. There was indeed nothing that Ronald could not persuade a man into if he tried. Lily felt that her own periods were more fiery, those eloquent sentences which her good sense had already condemned, but Ronald's arguments were beyond reply; there was no getting the better of them. You might not be sure that they were always sound, you might feel that there was a flaw somewhere; but to find out what it was, or to get your answer properly formed, or to convict him of error was more than anyone, certainly more than Lily, could do.

She had risen up, and was stretching her arms above her head in that natural protest against the languor and solitude which takes the form of weariness, when she saw a dark speck approaching on the road, and rushed to the window with the wild hope, which she knew was quite vain, that it might, by some possibility, be Ronald coming back. But it was only a rural geeg from Kinloch-Rugas or some other hamlet, or one of the farms in the neighbourhood, creeping up the road against the wind and the slippery, thawing snow, with a woman in it beside the driver, undistinguishable in her wraps. While Lily looked out and wondered if by any chance it might be a visitor, Beenie came in with a look of importance. "Eh, Miss Lily, do you see who that is?" Robina said.

"It is a woman, that is all I know—and keen upon her business to come out on such a day."

"Her business?" said Robina. "It's the Manse geeg,

and it's Miss Eelen in it, and as far as I can tell she has nae business, but just to spy out, if she can, the nakedness of the land."

"There is no nakedness in the land, and nothing to spy out," cried Lily, with a flush. "Have we done anything to be ashamed of that we should be feared of a neighbour's eye?"

"Bless me, no, Miss Lily!" cried Robina—but she added, "Eh, my bonnie bairn, there's many a thing that's no expedient though it's no wrong. I wouldna just say anything to Miss Eelen if I was you. She's maybe no to be trusted with a story. The minister had sent her out o' the road yon evening in the Manse. Baith me and Katrin remarked it; for she's his right hand, and he can do nothing without her in a common way; but yon time she just didna appear."

"Did he think I was not good enough—" Lily began in a flutter, but stopped immediately. "What a silly creature I am! as if there could be anything in that. Do you think I have such a long tongue that I want to go and publish to everybody everything that happens."

"Oh, Miss Lily, no me! never such a thought was in my head; but it would be real natural, and you no a person to speak to except Katrin and me, that are servants baith, though we would go through fire and water for you. But you see she wasna there, and if I were you, Miss Lily—"

"You happen not to be me," cried Lily, with eyes blazing, glad of an opportunity to shed upon Beenie something of the vague irritation in her heart; "and since we are speaking of that, what do you mean, both Katrin and you, that were both present, in calling me Miss Lily,

Miss Lily, as if I were a small thing in the nursery, when you know I am a married woman?" Lily cried, throwing back her head.

"Oh, Miss Lily," cried Robina, with a suppressed shriek, running to the door. She looked out with a little alarm, and then came back apologetically. "You never ken who may be about. That Dougal man might have been passing, though he has nothing ado up the stair."

"And what if he had been passing?" Lily said in high disdain.

"Oh, Miss Lily," cried Robina, again giving the girl a troubled look.

"Do you mean to say that Dougal does not know? Do you mean he thinks—that man that is my servant, that lives in the house—oh, what can he think?" cried Lily, clasping her hands together in the vehemence of her horror and shame.

"He just thinks nothing at a'. He's no a man to trouble anybody with what he thinks. He's keepit very weel in order, and if he daured to fash his head with what he has nae business with! He just guesses you twa are troth-plighted lovers, Miss Lily, and glad he was to get our young maister away."

Lily covered her face with her hands. "Am I a secret, then, a secret!" she cried. "Something that's hidden—just a lie—no true woman! How dared you let me do it, then; you that have been with me all my days? Why did ye not step in and say, 'Lily, Lily, it's all deceiving. It's a secret, something to be hidden!' Would I ever have bound myself to a secret, to be a man's wife and never to say it? Oh, Beenie, I thought you cared, that you were fond of me—and me not a

creature to tell me what I was doing! No mother, no friend, nobody but you."

"Miss Lily, Miss Lily, we thought it was for the best. Oh, we thought it was for the best, both Katrin and me! For God's sake dinna make an exhibition before Miss Eelen. Here she is, coming up the stair. For peety's sake, Miss Lily, for a'body's sake, if ye have ainy consideration—"

"Go away from me, you ill woman," cried Lily, stamping her foot on the ground. She stood in the middle of the room; wild and flushed and indignant, while Beenie disappeared into the bedchamber within. Helen Blythe, coming up a little breathless from the spiral staircase, paused with astonishment to see her friend's excited aspect, and the sounds of tempests in the air.

"Dear me! have I come in at a wrong time?" Helen said.

"Oh no," cried Lily, with a laugh of fierce emotion, "at the very best time, just to bring me back to myself. I've been having a quarrel with Beenie just for a little diversion. We've been at it hammer and tongs, calling each other all the bonnie names; or perhaps it was me that called her all the names. How do you think we could live out here in the quiet and the snow if we did not have a quarrel sometimes to keep up our hearts?"

"Lily, you are a strange lassie," said Helen, sitting down by the fire and loosening her cloak; "you just say whatever comes into your head. Poor Beenie! how could you have the heart to call her names? She is just given up to ye, my dear, body and soul."

"She is no better than a cheat and a deceiver,"

cried Lily. "She makes folk believe that she does what I tell her, and never opposes me, when she just sets herself against her mistress to do everything I hate and nothing I like, as if she were a black enemy and ill-wisher instead of a friend!"

This speech was delivered with great fervour, and emphasised by the sound of a sob from the inner room.

"Poor Beenie!" cried Helen, with mingled amusement and concern, "how is she to take all that from you, Lily? But you do not mean it in your heart?"

"No. I don't mean a word of it," cried Lily, "and it's just an old goose she is if she thinks I do. But for all that she is the most exasperating woman! I never saw anybody like her to be faithful as all the twelve apostles, and yet make you dance for rage half the time."

A faint "Oh, Miss Lily!" was heard from the inner room, and then a door was softly opened and shut, and it was evident that Beenie had slipped away.

"I heard ye were down at the Manse one day that I was away. It's seldom, seldom, I am from home, and at that hour above all. But I had to see some new folk at the Mill, and it was a good thing I went, for there has not been an open day since then. And I heard ye had a visitor with you, Lily."

Lily's heart seemed to stand still, but she made a great effort and mastered herself. "Yes," she said, "it was Mr. Lumsden (many married persons call their husbands Mr. So-and-So) that had come in quite suddenly—with the guisards on the last night of the year."

"I understand," said Helen, with a smile, "he wanted—and I cannot blame him—to be your first foot."

The first person who comes into a house in the New Year is called the first foot in Scotland, and there are rules of good luck and bad dependent upon who that is.

"It might be so," said Lily dreamily, "and I think he was, if that was what he wanted; but the kitchen was full of dancing and singing—the guisards making a great noise as it was Hogmanay night."

"That was to be expected," said Helen, "and I am glad you had a man, and a young man, and a weel-wisher, or I am sore mistaken, for your first foot. It brings luck to the New Year."

A "weel-wisher" means a lover in Scotland; just as in Italy a girl will say, *mi vuol bene*, when she means to say that someone loves her.

"He was here after—twice or thrice—and he wanted to thank the minister for all his kindness, and, as I was at the market with Beenie and Katrin, and he had offered to drive the pony, I went too. I thought I would have seen you, but you were not there."

"Oh, how sorry I was, Lily! but a sight of the market would aye be something. It's not like your grand ploys in Edinburgh, but its diverting too."

"Oh yes, said Lily, with great gravity, "it is diverting too."

"And you had need of something to divert you. What have you been doing, my bonnie wee lady, all this dreadful storm? I hope, at least, they have kept you warm. It is a dreadful thing, a winter in the country, when you are not used to it. But now the snow is over and the roads open; you and me must take a little

comfort in each other, Lily. I'm too old for you, and not so cheery as I might be."

Lily, suddenly looking at her visitor, saw that Helen's mild eyes were full of tears, and, with one of her sudden, impulsive movements, flung herself down on her knees at her friend's feet. "Oh, why are you not cheery, Helen? you that do everything you should do, and are so good."

"Oh, I'm far, far from good! It's little you know!" said Helen. "My heart just turns from all the good folk, whiles, out of a yearning I take for those that are the other way."

"You have some trouble, Helen—some real trouble," cried Lily, with a tone of compassion. "Will you tell me what it is?"

"Maybe another time—maybe another time," said Helen, "for my heart's too full to-day; and I can hear your poor Robina, that you have been so cruel to, coming up the stair, the kind creature, with a cup of tea."

CHAPTER XXIV.

HELEN stayed till the first shade of the darkening stole over the moor, and till the minister's man had told all the "clash" of the countryside to Katrin and Dougal, and received but a very limited stock of information in return. There was, indeed, much more danger to the secret which now dominated and filled the house of Dalrugas like an actual personage, from that chatter in the kitchen than from anything that could have taken place upstairs. For the minister's man was dimly aware that the young lady from Dalrugas had been in the village on that day when something mysterious was believed to have taken place in the Manse parlour; that she had been seen with a gentleman, and that Katrin and Robina had also been visible at the Manse. "Ay, was I," said Katrin, "I just took the minister a dizzen of my eggs. In the awfu' weather nobody has an egg but me. I just warm them up and pepper them up till they've nae idea whether it's summer or winter, and we lay regular a' the year round. I never grudge twa-three new-laid eggs to a delicate person, and the minister, poor gentleman, is no that strong, I'm feared."

"He's just as strong as a horse," said the minister's man, "and takes his dinner as if he followed the ploo—but new-laid eggs are nae doubt aye acceptable. The

gentleman was from here, that was paying him yon veesit, two days after the new Year?"

"We have nae gentleman here," said Katrin, stolid as her own cleanly-scrubbed table, on which she rested her hand. Dougal cocked his bonnet over his right ear, but gave no further sign. "There's been a gentleman—a friend of Sir Robert's—at Tam Robison's, and we had to gie him a bed a nicht or twa on account of the snaw. Now I think o't, he was a friend o' the minister's too. It's maybe him you're meaning, but he's back in Edinburgh, as far as I ken, these twa-three—"

"Weel, it would be him, or some other person," said the minister's man, with an affectation of indifference; but he returned to the subject, again and again, endeavouring, if he had been strong enough for the *rôle*, or if he had been confronted by a weak enough adversary, to surprise her into some avowal; but Katrin was too strong for him. It was with difficulty she could be got to understand what he meant. "Oh, it's aye yon same gentleman you're havering about! Eh, what would I ken about a strange gentleman? The minister is no my maister nor yet Dougal's. He might get a visit from Auld Nick himself, and it would be naething to him or me."

"It might be much to me," said the minister's man, who was known for a "bletherin' idiot" all over the parish. "It's just a secret; and a secret is aye worth siller."

"Well, I wish ye may get it," Katrin said. During this time she was, to tell the truth, more or less anxious about the demeanour of her husband. It was true that Dougal knew nothing, unless what he might have found

out for himself, putting two and two together. Katrin had great confidence in the slowness of his intellect and his incapacity to put together two and two. Perhaps her trust was too great in this incapacity, and too little in the dogged loyalty with which Dougal respected his own roof-tree and all that sheltered under it. At least the fact is certain that the authorised gossip of the parish carried very little with him to compensate him for the cold drive and all the miseries of the way.

Lily took out her letter and went over it again when Helen had gone. She found it far too eloquent, too argumentative, too full of a foregone conclusion. Why should she assume that Ronald did not mean to provide a home for her, that there was any reason to believe in an intention on his part of keeping their marriage a secret and their lives apart? All his behaviour during the past week had been against this. How could there have been a more devoted lover—a husband more adoring! She asked herself what there was in him to justify such fears, and answered herself: Nothing, nothing! not a shadow upon his love of delight in her presence, the happiness of being with her, for which he had sacrificed everything else. He might have spent that New Year amid all the mirth and holiday of his kind; in the merry crowd at home, or in Edinburgh, where he need never have spent an hour alone; and he had preferred to be shut up all alone with her, on the edge of a snowy, wintry moor. Did that look as if he loved her little, as if he made small account of her happiness? Oh no, no! It was she who was so full of doubts and fears, who had so little trust, who must surely love him less than he loved her, or such suggestions

would never have found a place in her heart. If she already felt this in the evening, how much more did she feel it next morning, when the post brought her a little note all full of love, and the sweet sorrow of farewell, which Ronald had slipped into the post in the first halting-place beyond Dalrugas? It was written in pencil, it was but three lines; but after she received it Lily indignantly snatched her letter from the blotting book and flung it into the fire, which was too good an end for such a cruel production. Was it possible that she had questioned the love of him who wrote to her like *that*? Was it possible that she, so adored, so longed for, should doubt in her heart whether he did not mean to conceal her like a guilty thing? Far from her be such unkind, disloyal thoughts. Ronald had gone off into the world as it is the man's right and privilege and his duty to do, to provide a nest for his mate. If she were left solitary for a moment, that was inevitable; it was but the natural pause till he should have prepared for her, as every husband did. Instead of the indignation, the resentment, the bitter doubt she had felt, nothing but compunction was now in Lily's mind. It was not he but she who was to blame. She was the unfaithful one, the weak and wavering soul who could never hold steadily to her faith, but doubted the absent as soon as his back was turned, and was worthy of nothing except to undergo the fate which her feeble affection feared.

She was, perhaps, a little high-flown in the revulsion of her feelings, as in the fervour of these feelings themselves. A little less might have been expected from Ronald, a little charity extended to him in his short-

coming; but certainly the vehemence and enthusiasm of her faith in him now was a little excessive. "Yes, it is better you should call me Miss Lily," she said to Robina, "it is best just to keep it to ourselves for a while. Mr. Lumsden thought of all that, though he left it entirely to me, without a word said. There would be so many questions asked—even Dougal—and Helen Blythe. I would have had to summer and winter it, and her not very quick at the uptake. It is a long time till Whitsunday," said Lily, with a little quiver of her lip. "I will just be Miss Ramsay till then."

"Eh, you will aye be Miss Lily to me, whatever," Beenie cried.

"And I am just Miss Lily," said her mistress, with a little air of dignity, which was new to the girl. It was as if a princess had consented to that humiliation, sweetly, with a grace of self-abnegation which made it an honour the more.

It cannot be denied, however, that it was difficult, after all the agitations that had passed, after the supreme excitement of the New Year, and the short, yet wonderful, union of their life together, to fall back upon that solitude, and endeavour, once more, to "take an interest" in the chickens and the ponies, and the humours of Sandy and Dougal, which Lily, in the beginning, had succeeded in occupying herself with, to some extent. She did what she could now to rouse her own faculties, to fill her mind with the harmless details of the practical life. How comforting it would have been had she but been compelled to plan and contrive like Katrin for all those practical necessities—how to feed her family, how to make the most of her provisions, how to diet

her cows and her hens, or, like Dougal, to care for the comfort of the beasts and amuse himself with Rory's temper, and the remarks that little snorting critic made upon things in general; or even to look over the "napery" and see if it wanted any fine darning, as Beenie did, and to regulate the buttons and strings of the garments and darning of the stockings. It is true Lily might have done some of these things, trying hard to make volunteer work into duty, and consequently into occupation and pleasure. But, Beenie being there, she had no need to do what would have simply thrown Beenie, instead of herself, out of work; and this was still more completely the case with Katrin, who, gladly as she would have contributed to the amusement in any way of her little mistress, would have resented, as well as been much astonished by, any interference with her own occupations. Lily could not do much more than pretend to be busy, whatever she did. She knitted socks for Ronald; beguiled by Beenie, she began with a little enthusiasm the manufacture into household necessities of a bale of linen found by Katrin among the stores of the establishment; but stopped soon with shame, asking herself what right she had to take Sir Robert's goods for that "plenishing" of abundant linen, which is dear to every Scotch housewife's heart. This was a scruple which the women could not share. "Wha should have it if no you?" cried Katrin. "Sir Robert he has just presses overflowing with as nice napery as you would wish to see. There is plenty to set up a house already, besides what's wanted, and never be missed; let alone that, except yourself, my bonnie Miss Lily, there is nae person to use thae fine sheets. But the auld led dy's web that

she had woven at the weaver's, and never lived to make it up—wha should have it, I should like to know, but you."

"Not while my uncle is the master, Katrin."

"I've nothing to say against Sir Robert," cried Katrin; "he's our maister, it's true, and no an ill maister, just gude enough as maisters go—but the auld led dy was just your ain grandmother, Miss Lily, and your plenishing would come out of her hands in the course of nature, and for wha but you would she have given all that yarn (that she span herself, most likely), to be made into a bonnie web o' linen? There is not a word to be said, as Robina will tell ye as weel as me. It's just a law afore a' the laws that a woman has her daughter's plenishing to look to, as soon as the bairn is born—and her bairn's bairn with a' the stronger reason, the only one that is left in the auld house."

"Eh, Miss Lily, that's just as sure as death," Beenie said.

But Lily was not to be convinced. She flung the great web of linen, in its glossy and slippery whiteness, at the two anxious figures standing by her, involving them both in its folds. "Take it yourselves, then," she said, with a laugh. "I am an honest lass in one way, if not in another. I will have none of grandmamma's linen that belongs to Sir Robert and not to me."

And then Lily snatched her plaid from the wardrobe and wrapped it round her, and ran out from all their exclamations and struggles for a ramble on the moor. Oh, the moor was cold these February days—the frost was gone and everything was running wet with moisture,

the turf between the ling bushes yielding like bog beneath the foot, the long, withered stalks of the heather flinging off showers of water at every touch, the black cuttings gleaming, the burn running fast and full. Lily began a devious course between the hummocks, leaping from one spot to another, as she had done with Ronald, saturating herself with the chilly freshness, as well as with the actual moisture of the moor; but this was an amusement which soon palled upon the girl alone. She felt the exercise fatigue her. And the contrast between her solitude and the time when she had always another hand so ready and so eager to help her, was more than she could bear. It was because they had to cling to each other so, because the mutual help was so sweet that they had loved it. Lily was reluctantly obliged to confess that it was no fun alone, and though it was a relief to walk even a little on the road, that was but a faint alleviation of the monotony of life. Sometimes the aspect of the mountains stole her from herself, or a sudden pageant of sunset, or something of a darker drama going on, if she had but any interpretation of it, among those hills. Anything going on, if it were but the gathering of the mist and the scent of the coming storm, was a relief to Lily. It was the long blank—not a passenger on the road, not an event in the day—which she could not bear.

And then, even if the walk, by dint of a sunset or some other occurrence, had been enlivening, there was always the shock of coming back, the shutting of her door against every invasion of life, the quiet that might have been comfort to her old grandmother—the old Leddy who had spun the yarn for that web of linen,

and received it home with triumph—was it for the plenishing of Lily unborn? Lily came to have a little horror of that old Leddy. She figured her to herself spinning, spinning, the little whirr of the wheel in its monotony going on for day after day. Lily did not think of the sons away in the world—Robert, wherever there was fighting: her own father always in trouble—that filled the old Leddy's thoughts, which were spun into that yarn, and might have made many a pattern of mystic meaning in the cold, snowy linen which looked so meaningless. She used to sit in the silent room, feeling that from some corner the old Leddy's eye was fixed upon her over the whirring wheel, till she could bear it no more.

She went down to Kinloch-Rugas to return Helen's visit, but that was not a happy experience. The old minister, half seen in gloaming, seated like a large shadow by the fire, gave her always a thrill of alarm. She had hoped that he would not have treated her as a secret, that he would have addressed her by her new name, and set her at once in a true position. But he did not do this. He looked at her not unkindly, and spoke to her with a compassionate tone in his voice. But he too seemed to accept the necessity which had been forced on her by a kind of unspoken command, a dilemma from which she could not escape. In these circumstances the consciousness of being in the presence of a man who knew all, but made no sign, sitting there by the side of innocent Helen, who knew nothing, and who treated herself in all simplicity as the girl Lily, the same as she had known before—was intolerable; and Lily did not go back again—much as the refuge of some

other house to go to was wanted—in her desolate state. “You’ll come and see me, Helen?” “That will I, my dear. You must not mind my father. He is kind—kind in his heart, and always a soft place for you.” “I am not thinking that he is unkind,” said Lily. Ah no, the minister was not unkind! He was sorry for the young abandoned wife, for—as he thought—the young betrayed woman; and Lily, though she was not aware of this last aggravation, yet resented it, feeling the pity in his tone. And why should anyone pity her, or venture to be sorry for her, and she with no secret in her own honest intention, Ronald Lumsden’s lawful wife?

As the days lengthened it was possible to be out of doors more, and Lily began to scour the country upon Rory, and to see, though in the doubly cold aspect of this formidable northern spring, many places about in which, in more genial weather, when “the families” were at home, there might be friends to be made. She had come home tired from one of these rides, and the day having been dry, had ventured a little on the moor, holding up her riding skirt, and looking towards the western hills, where a great sunset was about to be accomplished and all the unseen spectators were hastily putting on garments of gold and rose-colour and robes of purple for the ceremony. It was not like a mere bit of limited sky, but a world of colour, one hue of glory surging up after another as from some great treasury in the depths below, changing, combining, deepening, melting away in every kind of magical circle. Lily’s heart was not very light, but it rose instinctively to that wonderful display of nature. Oh, how beautiful it was!

Oh, if there had only been someone to whom to say that it was beautiful! Whether it was the glorious colour half blinding her with excessive radiance, or thought of the unshared spectacle, Lily's eyes filled full of tears. Either cause was enough. At Lily's age, and in such circumstances as hers, the tears are not slow to come.

And then in a moment she felt a touch upon her waist and a voice in her ear. "Was it ever like this before, my Lily, my Lily? or has it all lighted up for you and me, and because I am back again?"

There is one compensation for those who suffer from great anxiety, from the misery of separation, from longing after things that seem unattainable. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, a flood of blessedness comes over them in the momentary attainment, the momentary meeting, the instantaneous relief. It was like a warm tide that flooded the heart of Lily, sweeping every fancy and every doubt away. She leaned her head upon his shoulder, and murmured in her rapture, "Oh, Ronald, you've come back!"

"Did you think I could keep away from you?" he said. No, no, how could he have kept away from her? He had come to claim her—as he had always intended to claim her—now, this moment before the world.

CHAPTER XXV.

HE had come back; he had come—could there be any doubt on that point?—to take his wife away; to take her home.

Lily, at least in her own mind, would admit of no doubt. She was transported in a moment from the depths to the heights. So much the more as it had been impossible yesterday to see any light, there was now such a flushing of the whole horizon that doubt was out of the question. She came towards the house with him with his arm round her, thinking of no precautions. Why should they conceal anything, this young pair? The man had come to take his wife away. When he withdrew his arm from her waist, and drew her hand through it, it did not, however, strike her that there was anything in that. It was more decorous, like old married people, no longer mere lad and lass. She walked proudly by his side, leaning on his arm. Who cared if Sir Robert himself were there to see? Lily had never cared much for Sir Robert, had always been ready to defy him, and vindicate her rights over her own life. As it happened, there was nobody but Katrin standing at the door, looking out with her hand over her eyes. Katrin was very quick to make believe that she was dazzled by any little bit of light.

And the lonely moor lighted up and became as

Paradise to Lily. He brought her all kinds of news, besides the best news of all, which was to see him there. He brought back her old world to her—the world where she had been so happy and so full of friends: her new world, where so soon, in a day or two, she was to find her young companions again, and resume the former life, more cordial, more kind, more full of friendship and every gentle affection than ever.

While he sat there thawing, expanding, shaking the cold from him, Lily, who a little while ago had been the fastidious little maiden, courted and served, began to move about the room serving him, eager to get everything for him he wanted, to undo his muffler, to bring him his slippers. Yes, she would have liked to bring him his slippers as she brought him, like a housemaid, on a little silver salver—not a cup of tea, which probably Ronald would not have appreciated—but something stronger, “to keep out the cauld,” which Katrin recommended and brought upstairs with her own hands to the drawing-room door. “You are not going to serve me, my Lily?” Ronald said. “But I am just going to serve you,” she cried, with a little stamp of her foot, “and who has a better right? and who should wait on my man but me that am bound to take care of him? and him come to take me away.”

Was she afraid to say these words loud out lest they should break the spell? or was he afraid that she might say them and he not be able to ignore them? But between them something was thrown down, a noise was made in which they were inaudible. I do not know if Lily had any little tremor that made her avoid explanation that evening; at all events she had a sort of hunger

to be happy, to enjoy it to the utmost. She laid the table with her own hands, shutting the door in the face of the astonished Robina, who hurried up, as soon as she came in, to have her share. "I can do without you for all so grand as you think yourself," Lily cried. "I am just going to wait upon my own man."

"Oh, Miss Lily," cried Beenie, terrified: but she added to herself, "What a good thing there's naebody in the house! Dougal will not be in till it's late, and most likely he'll be fou when he comes—and be nane the wiser. And naething will need to be said." I cannot tell whether Katrin made quite the same explanation to herself: but she had taken her precautions in case that should happen to Dougal which happened in these days to many honest men on a market night, without much infringement of their character for sobriety. It would make the explanation much simpler about the gentleman upstairs. In short, it would not be necessary to make any explanation at all.

"Get out the boxes, Beenie," said Lily, at a later hour. "Do not make any fuss or have things lying about, for gentlemen, you know, cannot endure that: but just prepare quietly, without any fuss."

"Oh, Miss Lily! do you think it has come to that?" Beenie cried, clasping her hands, with a start of joyful surprise, but with a countenance full of doubt.

"And what else should it come to?" cried Lily, radiant. "Is this what folk are married for, to live one in Edinburgh, and one far up in the Hielands? And what should my man come for but to take me home?"

She must have believed it or she would not have said it with such boldness. She gave Beenie a shake

and then a kiss, but cried, "Don't make a confusion, don't leave the things lying about, for that is what gentlemen cannot endure," as she ran away to rejoin her husband. Robina stood immovable, looking after her. "Who has learnt her that?" she said to herself, and then she began to shake her head. "They soon; soon learn what a gentleman canna bide: and set him up! that he should not bide anything coming from her!" But Beenie did not bring out any boxes. She concluded that at all events it would be time enough for that to-morrow.

Ronald remained for three or four days, during which time Dougal, who had carried out the judicious provisions of the women, and had required no explanations of any kind on the market night, maintained a very sullen countenance and did not welcome the visitor, of whom he was suspicious without well knowing why. During this time there was scarcely any pretence kept up of sending Ronald off to the cottage of Tam Robison, or in any way making a stranger of him. He was "the young leddy's freend." "Young leddies had nae sic freends in my time," said Dougal. "They have aye had them in my time," said Katrin, "and that cannot be far different." He did not know what to say; but he was very glum and open to no blandishments on the part of the stranger. And those were days of anxious happiness for Lily. He said nothing upon that one sole subject which she longed to know of. He sounded no note of freedom amid all the litanies he sang to her about her own sweetness, her beauty, her kindness. Lily grew sick of hearing her own praises. "Oh, if he would but say I was an ugly, troublesome thing! and then say,

'You must be ready, Lily, for we're going home to-morrow!'" But Lily was very sweet to her husband: this short visit was full of delight to him: he loved to look at her, to take her in his arms, to know she was his. Going away from her was hard to bear. He would have bemoaned his very hard case if he had not feared that she would beseech him to put an end to it, to take her away with him, and that it need be hard no longer. That was not what he wanted. He preferred the moments of rapture and the separations between. At least he preferred them to the loss of many other things which would be otherwise involved.

One day they went down to the Manse, Lily riding upon Rory, and her husband walking by her side. "You can say I have just come over for the day," he said. "The minister, of course, knows very well, but your friend, Miss Helen—"

"Why should we tell lies about it, Ronald? Isn't it very easy, very easy to understand?"

"Oh, yes," he said, "in any case it's easy to understand: but we might as well avoid gossip if we could."

"There would be no gossip," cried Lily, "about a man coming to see his wife! The only thing would be that folk would wonder why he did not take her home."

"Folk would wonder about something, you may be sure: but I've noticed that ladies think less of that than men. You think it is natural that people's minds should be occupied with you, my bonnie Lily. And so it is: but not with a common man. Maybe it is the jealousy that's in human nature. I hate the chance of it, you see!"

He spoke with a little vehemence, and Lily's eyes

filled with tears. It was almost approaching the border of a first quarrel. "You and me," she said, plaintively, "though I would not have believed it, Ronald—do not always think the same."

"Did we ever think the same? No, Lily. But so long as we feel the same: and it's best to be on the safe side. I'll say I have come over for the day from—what to you call that place?—Ardenlennie, on the other side, where I had to see Sir John's man of business—which is true. And I found you coming out to pay your visit and came with you. Will that do?"

"Oh, it will do as well as any other—false story," said Lily, "if we are to go on telling lies all our days!"

"Not all our days, I hope," he said, gently. He was very good to her. No lover could have been more devoted to her service, with no eyes or ears but for her. That ride, though Lily was not happy in the depths of her heart, though she was fretted almost beyond endurance, was yet sweet to her, in spite of herself. "Do you mind how we careered along that other day, me riding, you running?" he said, "pushing at Rory behind, and pulling him before—and the poor little beast astonished with the weight on him of a long-legged chield instead of a bonnie lady. My Lily, what you did for me that day! What should I have done without you—at that or any other time?"

"You have to do without me—not that I think I am much good—when you go away."

"Come," he said, "you must not harp for ever on this going away. Hallo!" he added, immediately, retiring from her side with a sudden impulse as if some hand had pushed him away, "there is a man I know."

"A man you know!" she cried, startled, not so much by this intimation as by the start it produced in him.

"Not a very creditable acquaintance," he went on, with a short laugh, dropping Rory's bridle and keeping, as Lily remarked with a pang, quite apart from her. "I thought he had been at the other end of the world. He is Alick Duff, one of the Duffs of Blackscaur. They were once the great people up here: but the present laird, I believe, is never at home. You might ride on while I say a word to him. He's not an acquaintance for you."

Rory, however, at this moment did not show any inclination to quicken his pace, and Lily heard the greeting between the two men. "Hallo, Lumsden, is that you?" and "Duff! I thought you were at the other end of the world!"

"Well, no, here I am—not in such clover as you," said the new-comer with a rough laugh. "Present me to the lady, Ronnie—Miss Ramsay, I'm sure."

"This is Mr. Alick Duff—Miss Ramsay," Lumsden said, with a dark colour on his face. "We are going the same way."

"And I'm going the contrary road—I'm sorry," said the stranger, who was a heavy man, older and far less well looking than Ronald. "I'm going to have a look at the old place and see if they'll have anything to say to me there. Then I'm off again to the ends of the world as you say: and the further the better," he added, again with a harsh laugh. Rory by this time had moved on, and Lily, though she heard the men's voices almost loud on the still air, did not make out what they said.

In a few moments Ronald rejoined her, almost out of breath.

"That's the black sheep of the family;" he said; "not likely he'll get much of a reception at home, even if there's anybody there. The only thing that could be wished, for all belonging to him, is that he should never be heard of more."

"He is a dreadful-looking man," said Lily, with a shudder, "and seems to laugh at everything, and looks as if he might do any terrible thing."

"You should ask Helen Blythe about that," Ronald said. He was still keeping at a certain distance, the other wayfarer being still in sight. Ronald did not know that, when at the sudden turn of the next corner he resumed his place at Rory's bridle, it was almost in the heart of his wife to have pushed him back with her hands. This incident stopped the question about Helen Blythe which was trembling on Lily's lips. What could he know about Helen Blythe, and what could she have to do with this dreadful man?

The minister sat in his big chair as usual, immovable, by the fire, with a keen glance at Ronald and another at Lily as they came in. Lily was a little flushed with the fresh air and exercise, and with the associations of the place, and the sense that to one person here at least her secret was known. She would not take upon herself a syllable of the explanation which Ronald hastened to give fluently over her shoulder. "I am up at Ardenlennie on business with Sir John's factor," he said, "and I was so fortunate as to find Miss Ramsay just setting out on a visit to you—so I thought I might come too."

"You're welcome," said the minister curtly. "Come in to the fire, my dear young lady, and take a seat here."

"Eh, Lily, my dear," cried Helen, "I am feared you are not well—for you've turned white in a moment, after that bonnie colour you had!" Helen herself was not looking well. There was a little redness in her eyes as if she had been crying, and her cheeks were still paler than Lily's. She was interrupted by her father's peremptory voice.

"If you would but let your friends be! Sit down here and rest. No doubt ye're both tired and cold. And Eelen, if you had any sense you would get the tea."

"That's one word for you, Lily, and two for himself," said Helen, with a smile. "He's as fond of his tea as if he were an old woman. I will just tell Marget and come back in a moment." Perhaps she was glad to be out of sight, even for that moment: but poor Lily, wholly occupied with her own concerns, and wondering whether Helen knew anything, or how much she knew, or what she would think of this dreadful deception, had no leisure in her mind to think of any possible troubles of Helen's own.

"Did you meet any—waif characters on the road?" the minister said, with a bitter pause before the last words to give emphasis. It was said loud enough for Helen to hear.

"We met—Alick Duff; I thought he was in Australia or America. He is not precisely what one would call a—fine character," Lumsden said.

"There are not very many of them about," said the

old man; "some take one turn and some another; but them that stick to the straight road are few, as was said on a—more important occasion. And how will you be liking your stay in Dalrugas, Miss Lily, after all the daffing of the new year is over? A visitor for a day or so maybe makes it bearable; but it's lonely for the like of you."

"Oh," cried Lily, involuntarily putting her hands together, "I get very tired of it! But I think," she added, with a confidence she was far from feeling, "that I shall not be very long there now."

"Oh! ye think ye will not be very long there?" he repeated after her. There was no very great assurance or encouragement in his voice.

"Well," said Helen, who had come back, "I understand it's dull for you; but there is one person that will be very sorry, Lily. It will, maybe, be better for you, but the whole country-side will miss you; for many a one takes pleasure to see you pass—you and the powny—that never have said a word to you. She is just a public benefit," said the minister's daughter, "with her bonnie face."

A silence ensued, nobody said a word; and it became visible that Helen's cheeks were a little glazed, as if by sudden application of cold water to wash away certain stains from her eyes. She had seated herself for a moment where all the light from the window fell on her; but restlessly jumped up again and began to remove her work and some books from the table in preparation for tea. "And when are you leaving this neighbourhood, Mr. Lumsden? I hope you have some time to stay."

"Alas! I am going to-morrow. A man who has his work to do has little leisure," said Ronald. "We must keep our noses to the grindstone whatever happens. Ladies are better off."

"Do you think we are better off?" said Helen, with a sigh, "to bide at home whatever happens, and wait for news that, maybe, never comes; to see the others go away, and never be able to follow them, except with the longings of our hearts. I have had two brothers," she said, with a sudden little catch in her throat.

"Eelen," said the minister, "I never knew you for a hypocrite, whatever you were. It is none of your brothers——"

"Oh, father, how can you ken? Do I wear my heart on my sleeve that you can tell what's in it? You never thought much about them yourself, and how could you know what was in another's heart? But it's not for me to speak. I have aye my duty. It's just Mr. Lumsden's notion that it's a fine thing for us to sit quiet at home and endure all things and never hear."

"Well, here is your tea at all events," said Mr. Blythe, "and I see James Douglas passing the window to get a cup. When there's nothing to do in an afternoon, and everything low, as it is at that period in the day, there is a great diversion in tea. In fact," he added, "the best of meals is just the diversion they make. You are shaken out of yourself. Ye say your grace and ye carve your chuckie, or even a sheep's head on occasion, and your thoughts are taken clean away from the channel, maybe a troublesome one, that they were in. Still better is a cup of tea. Come ben, come ben, Mr. Douglas, there's plenty of room for you. We were just thinking,

Eelen and me, that it is a long time since you have been here."

A pleasant light shone in the young minister's face. "If I thought I could make myself missed, I would have the heart to stay away longer still," he said, "but then I think that out of sight is often out of mind."

It was pathetic to observe how he sought the eyes of Helen, and how he contrived to put his chair next hers at the table, round which they all sat. Helen took but little notice of the gentle young man; she set down his cup before him with a precipitation that was almost rude, and turned away to Lily, with whom she talked in an undertone. What about? Neither one nor the other knew. Yet neither one nor the other had any perception of what was in her neighbour's bosom. Helen's trouble to her filled all the world. It was greater than anything else she knew; the air tingled with it; the very horizon could scarcely contain it. Lily, a child, with all the world smiling upon her! What could there be in her lot to approach the greatness of the pain which Helen had to bear? She was half angry with the girl for making a fuss about being dull, as if that mattered; or seeing her sweetheart only by intervals, which was all, she thought, that Lily had to complain of. The little spoiled child! but what a real heartbreak was Helen knew.

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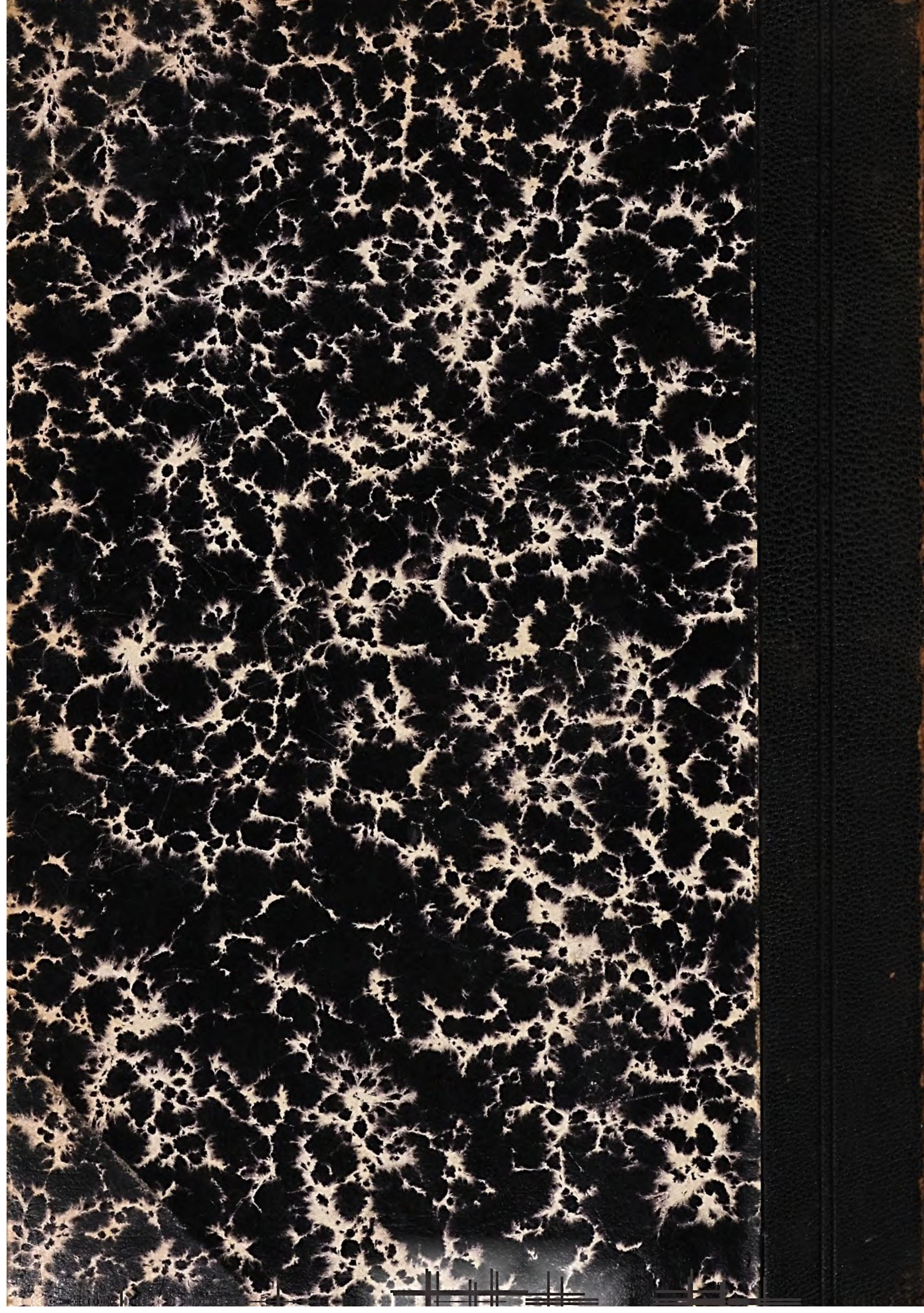
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